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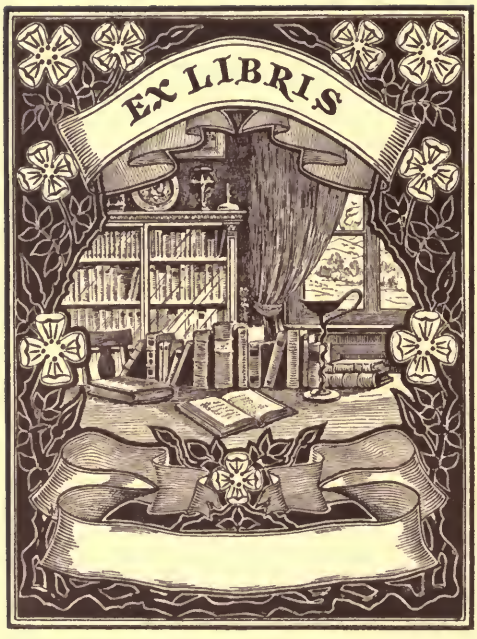
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ALFRED
LORD TENNYSON

CENTENARY EDITION

ILLUSTRATED

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The Works of Alfred Lord Tennyson

With a Preface by

Elisabeth Luther Cary

Together with Various Critical Introductions

Illustrated in Photogravure from Original Designs by

Frederick Simpson Coburn

and

Gustave Doré

In Eight Volumes

④

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Introduction

By Stopford A. Brooke

IN the *Idylls of the King* Tennyson has worked up into a whole the ancient story of Arthur, a story which is at least a thousand years old. How it first arose none can tell. Whether it has any historical basis it is also impossible to decide. It is supposed that there was an historical Arthur who fought twelve great battles with the English heathen, and who had many hero-chieftains under his sway and in his devotion, but the more we look at him the more his figure recedes into the mist of legend or of myth. Even the country where he reigned, and the lands over which his wars were waged, are not known to us. Some scholars make him a warrior of Southern Britain. Others place him in the north, beyond the border, and he fights with the Saxon chiefs from Dumbarton to the eastern coast, beating them back in twelve great battles. Out of the dim vapour of ancientry these two great figures rise, and the name of Arthur alone mingles

them into one. Tennyson takes the first tradition, and it is the one that has the most prevailed in literature.

It is not, however, with an historical, but with a mythical Arthur that we have to deal, and we need not be forced to surrender the wild island of Tintagil, the mystic expanse of Lyonnesse, the rock of Glastonbury rising from its marshes, and the lovely meadows round Cærleon upon Usk. *There* is our romantic country; there the legendary land where Arthur was born; there the valley of Avalon where he took refuge when wounded to the death. There is not one touch of the real world in all the scenery that Tennyson invents in his poem. It belongs throughout to that country which eye hath not seen nor ear heard, but which the heart of man has imagined. It is more than invented landscape. It often breathes the atmosphere of fairy lands, and of those dreams which open the spaceless realms beyond our senses. It seems to be born before the sight and then to die and be born in another form—changing, yet unchanged. No mortal hands have built the city of Arthur and his palace. It is no land dwelt in by bold bad men we see, when Arthur rides through the mountains and finds the diamonds; when Geraint and Enid go through the green gloom of the wood; when Galahad rides over the black swamp, leaping from bridge to bridge till he sail to the spiritual city; when Lancelot drives through the storm to the

enchanted towers of Carbonek seven days across the sea. Nor is the Nature actual Nature, but that which is seen

> From magic casements opening on the foam
> Of perilous seas, in fairy lands forlorn.

And when we can disburden ourselves of the ethics and allegory, the personages are still as dreamlike as the landscape, old as the seas that roll over Lyonnesse, and yet young forever in imagination. In our everyday world the Arthur and the Guinevere of Romance, Lancelot and the Lady of the Lake, Gawain and Galahad, Percival and Elaine are unreal shapes; yet how real they are in a better world! The interests of the world we call real fade and die, our children will not care for them; for half of them, for those that are not founded on love, we do not care ourselves, but the interests of romance are eternal. They blossom into a new spring year by year, and we take more thought for the fates of Lancelot and Guinevere than we do for what the Swede intends or what the French. For "fable is love's world," and the great myths and their figures are the dear inhabitants of the heart of man. Centuries have been stirred and thrilled by Arthur and his knights. England, France, Germany, and Italy have awakened into creation at their Celtic touch; and poetry, painting, sculpture, and music have replied to their enchantment. From Cornwall or the North

the story got to Wales; from Wales it fled to Brittany. From Brittany it returned to Wales and crossed the March into England in the *Brut* of Layamon, the first English poem of the imagination after the Conquest. But before that time, it had got from Brittany into France, and from France in French to England, where prose tales in Latin and poems in English and in Norman French sent it far and wide. Chaucer owned its power; Malory embodied it; Spenser seized it; Milton thought of it as an epic; Dryden considered it; Wordsworth touched it; Tennyson took up its lyre again; Morris and Swinburne and Arnold entered into its enchanted land. But it was characteristic of Tennyson's steadiness of temper and fulness of thought that he should try to make his form of it complete and new-created. At first it moved him only as romance, and we have seen how his youth played with it in *The Lady of Shalott*, in *Sir Galahad*, and in the ride of Lancelot and Guinevere through woods of love and spring. Then in the *Morte d'Arthur* the story was fitted in 1842 by certain modern touches to modern life, yet these had to be explained by the prologue and epilogue. In that poem itself the tale was chief; it follows the old romance and breathes its air.

In 1842, when the *Morte d'Arthur* appeared, Tennyson does not seem to have thought of making the story allegorical. I do not even think that when the first four *Idylls* were published—*Geraint and Enid; Merlin*

and Vivien; Lancelot and Elaine; and *Guinevere*—Tennyson wrote them with a set allegorical intention. They are only modernised by being made a representation of true love and false love. Vivien the harlot is set over against the tender innocence of Elaine. Enid, the true wife, is opposed to Guinevere who has been untrue. The men also represent different phases of love as modern as they are ancient. Geraint and Merlin, Lancelot and Arthur, have each their distinct lesson —beyond the story—to modern life. They have not yet become allegorical, and even the lesson, the ethical aim, is as yet subordinate to the story. True conduct, as is just in art, is indirectly, not directly taught.

But when we come to 1870—to the volume which began with *The Coming of Arthur*—the inner intention of the whole poem seems to be changed. The making of a kind of epic out of the story of Arthur, which should have an instructive but indirect relation to the moral needs of society and the individual, is placed upon the second plane. The poem is now an allegory of the soul of man warring with sense, and passing on its way through life to death, and through death to resurrection. The great rulers of the kingdom of human nature—the intellect, the conscience, the will, the imagination, the divine spirit in man—are shadowed forth in mystic personages. The historic powers which stand outside the soul and help it to reign and work—the Church, the Law, the great Graces of God—

are also embodied. Moreover, the various conditions of human nature in its growth from brutality to an ordered kingdom, that which saves or loses true life, the general desires and tendencies of man, the temptations which beset him, the wise and unwise views of the goal of life, the love which saves, the love which ruins, the religious passion which leads aright and that which leads astray, are symbolised before us in a number of other personages, episodes and events invented by Tennyson for the sake of his allegory.

The Coming of Arthur shows this conception fully orbed in the mind of Tennyson. Arthur is the rational soul, not the son of Uther and Ygerne, but coming mysteriously from heaven and washed into Merlin's arms by a great wave. Merlin who educates him is intellectual power, with all the magic of science. Arthur's kingship is opposed by the brutal and sensual powers in human nature, but the soul beats them down, and lets in light and justice over the waste places of human nature where the ape, the tiger, and the bandit lurk. Guinevere is the heart, and all we mean by the term. The soul, to do its work, must be knit to the heart in noble marriage—Arthur must be wed to Guinevere. The Knights of the Round Table are the high faculties in man whom the soul builds into order round it, to do its just and reforming will. When the King is crowned and married the three great fairies that stand by are Faith, Hope and Charity;

and the Lady of the Lake, " clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful," who gives the soul Excalibur—the sword of the Spirit—with which to do his war-work against base sense, appetite, and their disordered tyranny, is the Church. In embodying these conceptions, every word, every adjective, every description is weighed by Tennyson. The symbolism is extended into the remotest recesses of the tale. The allegory is thus fully launched in *The Coming of Arthur*, and the *Idylls* that were published with it, and that followed it, were written to the allegory. Even those that preceded it appear to have been somewhat modified to suit its requirements.

The question now arises, Of what kind was this allegory of Tennyson's, and how did he manage it? It differed from the allegories that preceded it. The great mediæval allegory, *The Romance of the Rose* (the type of an allegory in the Middle Ages), was nothing but an allegory. There was no story connected with it which was independent of the allegory. The series of events and adventures which brought the knight at last to the enjoyment of the Rose were allegorically invented, and each of them had its meaning. The story was obscure and the allegory was plain. But in Tennyson's poem the story existed already; it was independent of the allegory, and it forms an important part of the poem. Neither is the allegory plain; it is hidden beneath the story.

Our next allegory is *The Faerie Queene*. That is also plainly allegorical. The names make the meaning clear. The Red Cross Knight, Una, Duessa, Orgoglio, the Dragon, all tell their tale. But there is much more of a story in this first book of *The Faerie Queene* (and I speak of the first book alone, for it is the only one which has a clear unity) than there is in *The Romance of the Rose*. We are nearly as much interested in the knight, in Una, and in many of the minor characters, as we might be if they were real personages, and not images of truth and purity, of pride and falsehood and hypocrisy. But in Tennyson's poem the story is often greater than the allegory; it still breathes, and moves, and interests those to whom allegory is a weariness. At other times the story is of equal weight with the allegory, and we can ignore the allegory if it pleases us to do so. This separates altogether the *Idylls of the King* from *The Faerie Queene*. Moreover the names are not allegorical. We have to search for a hidden, not to follow a plain allegory. Spenser invented a story to suit his conception; Tennyson took an old tale and inserted his conception into it. But he was forced by his allegorical end to frequently invent as well, and his inventions though they are often of the finest quality (as in *The Holy Grail*), confuse our interest in the story as much as the story confuses their meaning. The allegory and the tale do not fit throughout. They clash and trouble one another. An allegory, to be

right in art, ought to have a story entirely invented for its purpose.

The next great allegory with which we may compare that of Tennyson is the first book of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. This is the finest allegory in the English language—the ideal art-thing. It proclaims itself an allegory by the names. The city of Vanity Fair, the Delectable Mountains, tell what they are; and yet these places seem as real as London and the Surrey Hills. Christian and Pliable, Faithful and Old Adam, Wanton and Mr. Worldly-Wiseman, Great-Heart and Giant Despair, tell also who and what they are; and yet they are all alive, they talk like living beings; we have met them in life—yesterday in the streets; they awaken the keenest human interest.

It is this combination of reality and allegory, of story and symbol, each of them clear, vivid, and human, and both going straight home to the experiences of the soul, which lifts *The Pilgrim's Progress* into the highest place. The story and the allegory are of almost equal weight in the imagination. The inherent fault of an allegory—want of human interest—has been overcome without any loss of the allegorical interest. This is a real triumph. Nobody else but Dante has done it, and his way was only partly allegorical. Tennyson has not done it. His poem is not plainly an allegory, nor is it plainly a story. Sometimes the men and the women are real, sometimes they are mere

shadows. Sometimes the events are human and romantic, sometimes they are metaphysical, theological ideas in a romantic dress. We glide from reality to vision and from vision to reality. The two things are not amalgamated. In fact, the allegory might as well have been left out altogether, and this statement, if it be true, condemns the allegory in the *Idylls of the King*. Nevertheless, there is something more to be said. Bunyan reached his perfection of work in this kind of literature by natural *naïveté*, by the unconsciousness and the faith of a childlike imagination. Tennyson reached what excellence he did reach in this matter by sheer dint of intellect. Few things have given me so high an idea of Tennyson's intellectual power as separate from his imagination, as his fitting in of the allegorical conceptions into the body of the story. He does not succeed in doing it well, because it was not in art to do it well; but the efforts his intellect makes to do it, and the comparative success he attained, are proof of great intellectual power. They are failures, but they are gigantic struggles for success.

It is almost a pity that he made these efforts at all. They confuse his ethical ends, and they were not needed to attain those ends. All he wanted to teach he could have taught and does teach through the acts of the men and women of the story. The repentance of Guinevere and the forgiveness of Arthur are far more impressive and far simpler in their lesson to life, when

we see Arthur as Arthur, and Guinevere as Guinevere, than when we see Arthur as the rational soul, and Guinevere as the heart in human nature. Moreover, they are not only needless and confusing efforts, they are also not good art. They are apart from the true realm of poetry. We are conscious that in working them out and weaving them in, elaborate thinking has taken the place of creative emotion; that art has partly abdicated her throne to the understanding. Whenever the allegory is mingled up with the story, the poetry is disturbed, the tale is weak, and we are a little wearied. This is not the case when the story is all allegorical, when it is invented by Tennyson for the allegory, as in *The Holy Grail*. Then there is no confusion, and the poem is in the highest degree poetic. What I say applies to the mixed poems, like *Merlin and Vivien*. Moreover, the artist's childlike pleasure in the tale and his sympathy with its passionate elements, are replaced (when the allegory is too obviously intruded) by a want of naturalness, even by a kind of pride in cleverness, which that *parvenu*, the analysing intellect, always brings into poetry. I sometimes seem to detect that Tennyson really loved the work his intellect did on the allegory more than the work his imagination did upon the story; that he loved the meanings he inserted into the tale more than the noble tale itself. This was a great mistake on his part, a mistake that artists make when they are seduced by the understanding.

No one, a hundred years hence, will care a straw about the allegory; but men will always care for the story, and how the poet has made the persons in it set forth their human nature on the stage of life. The humanity, not the metaphysics, is the interesting thing, and Malory's book, though Tennyson decries its morality, is more human, more moral, than the *Idylls of the King*. Even the far-off mythic Arthur is more at home with us than the Arthur of the *Idylls* whenever we are forced to consider him as the rational soul.

Within the realm of art much might be said of the technic of the verse. The poem belongs—though its composition stretched over so many years—to the central period of the blank verse of Tennyson, before he had wrought out (not to his or our advantage) a new kind of blank verse for his dramas, the habitude of which stole into the blank verse of his old age, and made it in undramatic poems less musical, less delightful, even less skilful than it was of old. But here, through this long series of poems, the blank verse is of almost equal excellence throughout. It is, as a vehicle of thought and emotion, entirely at the poet's command. He can make it do exactly what he likes. It has, at his choice, ease and rapidity, or slow and stately movement, or it echoes in its sound the thought, the scene, or the thing. It is by turns loud or low, soft or rough in spirit, fluid or rigid, abrupt, delayed, smooth, continuous, weighty and light. There are also none

of the changes, tricks and placing of cæsura or accent which all the artists of the past in blank verse and especially Milton have used, with which Tennyson is not acquainted, and which he does not himself use with as much science as art. Yet the result is all his own. His blank verse stands apart, original, growing out of his own character and temper, and frequently modified and specialised by the special characters whom he is describing, and by the special forms of natural scenery which he paints. Lastly, it is extraordinarily concise—almost too concise. It sometimes becomes bald, its tricks are sometimes too plain and too often repeated; it often wants a rushing movement, and it is always a little too academic. We are too conscious of its skill, of the infinite care spent on it, of a certain want of naturalness; that is, it has the defects of its qualities. But we forget these defects when it is at its best. Then indeed it is extraordinarily noble, rolling like a full-fed river through the country of imagination. Such it is in *The Holy Grail*, in *Guinevere*, in *The Passing of Arthur*.

From "Tennyson: His Art and Relation to Modern Life."

Dedication

Dedication

THESE to His Memory—since he held them
dear,
Perchance as finding there unconsciously
Some image of himself—I dedicate,
I dedicate, I consecrate with tears—
These Idylls.

And indeed he seems to me
Scarce other than my king's ideal knight,
"Who reverenced his conscience as his king;
Whose glory was, redressing human wrong;
Who spake no slander, no, nor listen'd to it;
Who loved one only and who clave to her—"
Her—over all whose realms to their last isle,
Commingled with the gloom of imminent war,
The shadow of his loss drew like eclipse,
Darkening the world. We have lost him; he is gone.
We know him now; all narrow jealousies
Are silent; and we see him as he moved,

How modest, kindly, all-accomplish'd, wise,
With what sublime repression of himself,
And in what limits, and how tenderly;
Not swaying to this faction or to that;
Not making his high place the lawless perch
Of wing'd ambitions, nor a vantage-ground
For pleasure; but thro' all this tract of years
Wearing the white flower of a blameless life,
Before a thousand peering littlenesses,
In that fierce light which beats upon a throne
And blackens every blot; for where is he
Who dares foreshadow for an only son
A lovelier life, a more unstain'd, than his?
Or how should England dreaming of *his* sons
Hope more for these than some inheritance
Of such a life, a heart, a mind as thine,
Thou noble Father of her Kings to be,
Laborious for her people and her poor—
Voice in the rich dawn of an ampler day—
Far-sighted summoner of War and Waste
To fruitful strifes and rivalries of peace—
Sweet nature gilded by the gracious gleam
Of letters, dear to Science, dear to Art,
Dear to thy land and ours, a Prince indeed,
Beyond all titles, and a household name,
Hereafter, thro' all times, Albert the Good.

Break not, O woman's-heart, but still endure;

Dedication

Break not, for thou art royal, but endure,
Remembering all the beauty of that star
Which shone so close beside thee that ye made
One light together, but has past and leaves
The Crown a lonely splendour.

May all love,
His love, unseen but felt, o'ershadow thee,
The love of all thy sons encompass thee,
The love of all thy daughters cherish thee,
The love of all thy people comfort thee,
Till God's love set thee at his side again!

The Coming of Arthur

The Coming of Arthur

LEODOGRAN, the king of Cameliard,
Had one fair daughter, and none other child;
And she was fairest of all flesh on earth,
Guinevere, and in her his one delight.

For many a petty king ere Arthur came
Ruled in this isle, and ever waging war
Each upon other, wasted all the land;
And still from time to time the heathen host
Swarm'd over-seas, and harried what was left.
And so there grew great tracts of wilderness,
Wherein the beast was ever more and more,
But man was less and less, till Arthur came.
For first Aurelius lived and fought and died,
And after him King Uther fought and died,
But either fail'd to make the kingdom one.
And after these King Arthur for a space,

And thro' the puissance of his Table Round,
Drew all their petty princedoms under him,
Their king and head, and made a realm and reign'd.

And thus the land of Cameliard was waste,
Thick with wet woods, and many a beast therein,
And none or few to scare or chase the beast;
So that wild dog and wolf and boar and bear
Came night and day, and rooted in the fields,
And wallow'd in the gardens of the King.
And ever and anon the wolf would steal
The children and devour, but now and then,
Her own brood lost or dead, lent her fierce teat
To human sucklings; and the children, housed
In her foul den, there at their meat would growl,
And mock their foster-mother on four feet,
Till, straighten'd, they grew up to wolf-like men,
Worse than the wolves. And King Leodogran
Groan'd for the Roman legions here again
And Cæsar's eagle. Then his brother king,
Urien, assail'd him; last a heathen horde,
Reddening the sun with smoke and earth with blood,
And on the spike that split the mother's heart
Spitting the child, brake on him, till, amazed,
He knew not whither he should turn for aid.

But—for he heard of Arthur newly crown'd,

Tho' not without an uproar made by those
Who cried, "He is not Uther's son"—the King
Sent to him, saying, "Arise, and help us thou!
For here between the man and beast we die."

And Arthur yet had done no deed of arms,
But heard the call and came; and Guinevere
Stood by the castle walls to watch him pass;
But since he neither wore on helm or shield
The golden symbol of his kinglihood,
But rode a simple knight among his knights,
And many of these in richer arms than he,
She saw him not, or mark'd not, if she saw,
One among many, tho' his face was bare.
But Arthur, looking downward as he past,
Felt the light of her eyes into his life
Smite on the sudden, yet rode on, and pitch'd
His tents beside the forest. Then he drave
The heathen; after, slew the beast, and fell'd
The forest, letting in the sun, and made
Broad pathways for the hunter and the knight,
And so return'd.

For while he linger'd there,
A doubt that ever smoulder'd in the hearts
Of those great lords and barons of his realm
Flash'd forth and into war; for most of these,
Colleaguing with a score of petty kings,

Made head against him, crying: " Who is he
That he should rule us? who hath proven him
King Uther's son? for lo! we look at him,
And find nor face nor bearing, limbs nor voice,
Are like to those of Uther whom we knew.
This is the son of Gorloïs, not the King;
This is the son of Anton, not the King."

And Arthur, passing thence to battle, felt
Travail, and throes and agonies of the life,
Desiring to be join'd with Guinevere;
And thinking as he rode, " Her father said
That there between the man and beast they die.
Shall I not lift her from this land of beasts
Up to my throne, and side by side with me?
What happiness to reign a lonely king,
Vext—O ye stars that shudder over me,
O earth that soundest hollow under me,
Vext with waste dreams? for saying I be join'd
To her that is the fairest under heaven,
I seem as nothing in the mighty world,
And cannot will my will, nor work my work,
Wholly, nor make myself in mine own realm
Victor and lord. But were I join'd with her,
Then might we live together as one life,
And reigning with one will in everything
Have power on this dark land to lighten it,
And power on this dead world to make it live."

The Coming of Arthur

Thereafter—as he speaks who tells the tale—
When Arthur reach'd a field of battle bright
With pitch'd pavilions of his foe, the world
Was all so clear about him that he saw
The smallest rock far on the faintest hill,
And even in high day the morning star.
So when the King had set his banner broad,
At once from either side, with trumpet-blast,
And shouts, and clarions shrilling unto blood,
The long-lanced battle let their horses run.
And now the barons and the kings prevail'd,
And now the King, as here and there that war
Went swaying; but the Powers who walk the world
Made lightnings and great thunders over him,
And dazed all eyes, till Arthur by main might,
And mightier of his hands with every blow,
And leading all his knighthood threw the kings,
Carádos, Urien, Cradlemont of Wales,
Claudius, and Clariance of Northumberland,
The King Brandagoras of Latangor,
With Anguisant of Erin, Morganore,
And Lot of Orkney. Then, before a voice
As dreadful as the shout of one who sees
To one who sins, and deems himself alone
And all the world asleep, they swerved and brake
Flying, and Arthur call'd to stay the brands
That hack'd among the flyers, " Ho! they yield! "
So like a painted battle the war stood

Silenced, the living quiet as the dead,
And in the heart of Arthur joy was lord.
He laugh'd upon his warrior whom he loved
And honour'd most. "Thou dost not doubt me King,
So well thine arm hath wrought for me to-day."
"Sir and my liege," he cried, "the fire of God
Descends upon thee in the battle-field.
I know thee for my King!" Whereat the two,
For each had warded either in the fight,
Sware on the field of death a deathless love.
And Arthur said: "Man's word is God in man;
Let chance what will, I trust thee to the death."

Then quickly from the foughten field he sent
Ulfius, and Brastias, and Bedivere,
His new-made knights, to King Leodogran,
Saying, "If I in aught have served thee well,
Give me thy daughter Guinevere to wife."

Whom when he heard, Leodogran in heart
Debating—"How should I that am a king,
However much he holp me at my need,
Give my one daughter saving to a king,
And a king's son?"—lifted his voice, and call'd
A hoary man, his chamberlain, to whom
He trusted all things, and of him required
His counsel: "Knowest thou aught of Arthur's birth?"

Then spake the hoary chamberlain and said:

"Sir King, there be but two old men that know;
And each is twice as old as I; and one
Is Merlin, the wise man that ever served
King Uther thro' his magic art, and one
Is Merlin's master—so they call him—Bleys,
Who taught him magic; but the scholar ran
Before the master, and so far, that Bleys
Laid magic by, and sat him down, and wrote
All things and whatsoever Merlin did
In one great annal-book, where after-years
Will learn the secret of our Arthur's birth."

To whom the King Leodogran replied:
"O friend, had I been holpen half as well
By this King Arthur as by thee to-day,
Then beast and man had had their share of me;
But summon here before us yet once more
Ulfius, and Brastias, and Bedivere."

Then, when they came before him, the King said:
"I have seen the cuckoo chased by lesser fowl,
And reason in the chase; but wherefore now
Do these your lords stir up the heat of war,
Some calling Arthur born of Gorloïs,
Others of Anton? Tell me, ye yourselves,
Hold ye this Arthur for King Uther's son?"

And Ulfius and Brastias answer'd, "Ay."
Then Bedivere, the first of all his knights,

Knighted by Arthur at his crowning, spake—
For bold in heart and act and word was he,
Whenever slander breathed against the King—

"Sir, there be many rumours on this head;
For there be those who hate him in their hearts,
Call him baseborn, and since his ways are sweet,
And theirs are bestial, hold him less than man;
And there be those who deem him more than man,
And dream he dropt from heaven. But my belief
In all this matter—so ye care to learn—
Sir, for ye know that in King Uther's time
The prince and warrior Gorloïs, he that held
Tintagil castle by the Cornish sea,
Was wedded with a winsome wife, Ygerne;
And daughters had she borne him,—one whereof,
Lot's wife, the Queen of Orkney, Bellicent,
Hath ever like a loyal sister cleaved
To Arthur,—but a son she had not borne.
And Uther cast upon her eyes of love;
But she, a stainless wife to Gorloïs,
So loathed the bright dishonour of his love
That Gorloïs and King Uther went to war,
And overthrown was Gorloïs and slain.
Then Uther in his wrath and heat besieged
Ygerne within Tintagil, where her men,
Seeing the mighty swarm about their walls,
Left her and fled, and Uther enter'd in,

And there was none to call to but himself.
So, compass'd by the power of the King,
Enforced she was to wed him in her tears,
And with a shameful swiftness; afterward,
Not many moons, King Uther died himself,
Moaning and wailing for an heir to rule
After him, lest the realm should go to wrack.
And that same night, the night of the new year,
By reason of the bitterness and grief
That vext his mother, all before his time
Was Arthur born, and all as soon as born
Deliver'd at a secret postern-gate
To Merlin, to be holden far apart
Until his hour should come, because the lords
Of that fierce day were as the lords of this,
Wild beasts, and surely would have torn the child
Piecemeal among them, had they known; for each
But sought to rule for his own self and hand,
And many hated Uther for the sake
Of Gorloïs. Wherefore Merlin took the child,
And gave him to Sir Anton, an old knight
And ancient friend of Uther; and his wife
Nursed the young prince, and rear'd him with her own;
And no man knew. And ever since the lords
Have foughten like wild beasts among themselves,
So that the realm has gone to wrack; but now,
This year, when Merlin—for his hour had come—
Brought Arthur forth, and set him in the hall,

Proclaiming, 'Here is Uther's heir, your king,'
A hundred voices cried: 'Away with him!
No king of ours! a son of Gorloïs he,
Or else the child of Anton, and no king,
Or else baseborn.' Yet Merlin thro' his craft,
And while the people clamour'd for a king,
Had Arthur crown'd; but after, the great lords
Banded, and so brake out in open war."

Then while the King debated with himself
If Arthur were the child of shamefulness,
Or born the son of Gorloïs after death,
Or Uther's son, and born before his time,
Or whether there were truth in anything
Said by these three, there came to Cameliard,
With Gawain and young Modred, her two sons,
Lot's wife, the Queen of Orkney, Bellicent;
Whom as he could, not as he would, the King
Made feast for, saying, as they sat at meat,

"A doubtful throne is ice on summer seas.
Ye come from Arthur's court. Victor his men
Report him! Yea, but ye—think ye this king—
So many those that hate him, and so strong,
So few his knights, however brave they be—
Hath body enow to hold his foemen down?"

"O King," she cried, "and I will tell thee: few,

Few, but all brave, all of one mind with him;
For I was near him when the savage yells
Of Uther's peerage died, and Arthur sat
Crowned on the daïs, and his warriors cried,
'Be thou the king, and we will work thy will
Who love thee.' Then the King in low deep tones,
And simple words of great authority,
Bound them by so strait vows to his own self
That when they rose, knighted from kneeling, some
Were pale as at the passing of a ghost,
Some flush'd, and others dazed, as one who wakes
Half-blinded at the coming of a light.

"But when he spake, and cheer'd his Table Round
With large, divine, and comfortable words,
Beyond my tongue to tell thee—I beheld
From eye to eye thro' all their Order flash
A momentary likeness of the King;
And ere it left their faces, thro' the cross
And those around it and the Crucified,
Down from the casement over Arthur, smote
Flame-colour, vert, and azure, in three rays,
One falling upon each of three fair queens
Who stood in silence near his throne, the friends
Of Arthur, gazing on him, tall, with bright
Sweet faces, who will help him at his need.

"And there I saw mage Merlin, whose vast wit

And hundred winters are but as the hands
Of loyal vassals toiling for their liege.

" And near him stood the Lady of the Lake,
Who knows a subtler magic than his own—
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful.
She gave the King his huge cross-hilted sword,
Whereby to drive the heathen out. A mist
Of incense curl'd about her, and her face
Wellnigh was hidden in the minster gloom;
But there was heard among the holy hymns
A voice as of the waters, for she dwells
Down in a deep—calm, whatsoever storms
May shake the world—and when the surface rolls,
Hath power to walk the waters like our Lord.

" There likewise I beheld Excalibur
Before him at his crowning borne, the sword
That rose from out the bosom of the lake,
And Arthur row'd across and took it—rich
With jewels, elfin Urim, on the hilt,
Bewildering heart and eye—the blade so bright
That men are blinded by it—on one side,
Graven in the oldest tongue of all this world,
' Take me,' but turn the blade and ye shall see,
And written in the speech ye speak yourself,
' Cast me away! ' And sad was Arthur's face
Taking it, but old Merlin counsell'd him,

'Take thou and strike! the time to cast away
Is yet far-off.' So this great brand the King
Took, and by this will beat his foemen down."

Thereat Leodogran rejoiced, but thought
To sift his doubtings to the last, and ask'd,
Fixing full eyes of question on her face,
"The swallow and the swift are near akin,
But thou art closer to this noble prince,
Being his own dear sister," and she said,
"Daughter of Gorloïs and Ygerne am I;"
"And therefore Arthur's sister?" ask'd the King.
She answer'd, "These be secret things," and sign'd
To those two sons to pass, and let them be.
And Gawain went, and breaking into song
Sprang out, and follow'd by his flying hair
Ran like a colt, and leapt at all he saw;
But Modred laid his ear beside the doors,
And there half-heard—the same that afterward
Struck for the throne, and striking found his doom.

And then the Queen made answer: "What know I?
For dark my mother was in eyes and hair,
And dark in hair and eyes am I; and dark
Was Gorloïs; yea, and dark was Uther too,
Wellnigh to blackness; but this King is fair
Beyond the race of Britons and of men.
Moreover, always in my mind I hear

A cry from out the dawning of my life,
A mother weeping, and I hear her say,
'O that ye had some brother, pretty one,
To guard thee on the rough ways of the world.'"

"Ay," said the King, "and hear ye such a cry?
But when did Arthur chance upon thee first?"

"O King!" she cried, "and I will tell thee true.
He found me first when yet a little maid.
Beaten I had been for a little fault
Whereof I was not guilty; and out I ran
And flung myself down on a bank of heath,
And hated this fair world and all therein,
And wept, and wish'd that I were dead; and he—
I know not whether of himself he came,
Or brought by Merlin, who, they say, can walk
Unseen at pleasure—he was at my side,
And spake sweet words, and comforted my heart,
And dried my tears, being a child with me.
And many a time he came, and evermore
As I grew greater grew with me; and sad
At times he seem'd, and sad with him was I,
Stern too at times, and then I loved him not,
But sweet again, and then I loved him well.
And now of late I see him less and less,
But those first days had golden hours for me,
For then I surely thought he would be king.

" But let me tell thee now another tale:
For Bleys, our Merlin's master, as they say,
Died but of late, and sent his cry to me,
To hear him speak before he left his life.
Shrunk like a fairy changeling lay the mage;
And when I enter'd told me that himself
And Merlin ever served about the King,
Uther, before he died; and on the night
When Uther in Tintagil past away
Moaning and wailing for an heir, the two
Left the still King, and passing forth to breathe,
Then from the castle gateway by the chasm
Descending thro' the dismal night—a night
In which the bounds of heaven and earth were lost—
Beheld, so high upon the dreary deeps
It seem'd in heaven, a ship, the shape thereof
A dragon wing'd, and all from stem to stern
Bright with a shining people on the decks,
And gone as soon as seen. And then the two
Dropt to the cove, and watch'd the great sea fall,
Wave after wave, each mightier than the last,
Till last, a ninth one, gathering half the deep
And full of voices, slowly rose and plunged
Roaring, and all the wave was in a flame;
And down the wave and in the flame was borne
A naked babe, and rode to Merlin's feet,
Who stoopt and caught the babe, and cried, 'The King!
Here is an heir for Uther!' And the fringe

Of that great breaker, sweeping up the strand,
Lash'd at the wizard as he spake the word,
And all at once all round him rose in fire,
So that the child and he were clothed in fire.
And presently thereafter follow'd calm,
Free sky and stars. 'And this same child,' he said,
'Is he who reigns; nor could I part in peace
Till this were told.' And saying this the seer
Went thro' the strait and dreadful pass of death,
Not ever to be question'd any more
Save on the further side; but when I met
Merlin, and ask'd him if these things were truth—
The shining dragon and the naked child
Descending in the glory of the seas—
He laugh'd as is his wont, and answer'd me
In riddling triplets of old time, and said:

" 'Rain, rain, and sun! a rainbow in the sky!
A young man will be wiser by and by;
An old man's wit may wander ere he die.

" 'Rain, rain, and sun! a rainbow on the lea!
And truth is this to me, and that to thee;
And truth or clothed or naked let it be.

" 'Rain, sun, and rain! and the free blossom blows;
Sun, rain, and sun! and where is he who knows?
From the great deep to the great deep he goes.'

"So Merlin riddling anger'd me; but thou
Fear not to give this King thine only child,
Guinevere; so great bards of him will sing
Hereafter, and dark sayings from of old
Ranging and ringing thro' the minds of men,
And echo'd by old folk beside their fires
For comfort after their wage-work is done,
Speak of the King; and Merlin in our time
Hath spoken also, not in jest, and sworn
Tho' men may wound him that he will not die,
But pass, again to come; and then or now
Utterly smite the heathen underfoot,
Till these and all men hail him for their king."

She spake and King Leodogran rejoiced,
But musing "Shall I answer yea or nay?"
Doubted, and drowsed, nodded and slept, and saw,
Dreaming, a slope of land that ever grew,
Field after field, up to a height, the peak
Haze-hidden, and thereon a phantom king,
Now looming, and now lost; and on the slope
The sword rose, the hind fell, the herd was driven,
Fire glimpsed; and all the land from roof and rick,
In drifts of smoke before a rolling wind,
Stream'd to the peak, and mingled with the haze
And made it thicker; while the phantom king
Sent out at times a voice; and here or there
Stood one who pointed toward the voice, the rest

Slew on and burnt, crying, "No king of ours,
No son of Uther, and no king of ours;"
Till with a wink his dream was changed, the haze
Descended, and the solid earth became
As nothing, but the King stood out in heaven,
Crown'd. And Leodogran awoke, and sent
Ulfius, and Brastias, and Bedivere,
Back to the court of Arthur answering yea.

Then Arthur charged his warrior whom he loved
And honour'd most, Sir Lancelot, to ride forth
And bring the Queen, and watch'd him from the gates;
And Lancelot past away among the flowers—
For then was latter April—and return'd
Among the flowers, in May, with Guinevere.
To whom arrived, by Dubric the high saint,
Chief of the church in Britain, and before
The stateliest of her altar-shrines, the King
That morn was married, while in stainless white,
The fair beginners of a nobler time,
And glorying in their vows and him, his knights
Stood round him, and rejoicing in his joy.
Far shone the fields of May thro' open door,
The sacred altar blossom'd white with May,
The sun of May descended on their King,
They gazed on all earth's beauty in their Queen,
Roll'd incense, and there past along the hymns
A voice as of the waters, while the two

Sware at the shrine of Christ a deathless love.
And Arthur said, "Behold, thy doom is mine.
Let chance what will, I love thee to the death!"
To whom the Queen replied with drooping eyes,
"King and my lord, I love thee to the death!"
And holy Dubric spread his hands and spake:
"Reign ye, and live and love, and make the world
Other, and may thy Queen be one with thee,
And all this Order of thy Table Round
Fulfil the boundless purpose of their King!"

So Dubric said; but when they left the shrine
Great lords from Rome before the portal stood,
In scornful stillness gazing as they past;
Then while they paced a city all on fire
With sun and cloth of gold, the trumpets blew,
And Arthur's knighthood sang before the King:—

"Blow trumpet, for the world is white with May!
Blow trumpet, the long night hath roll'd away!
Blow thro' the living world—'Let the King reign!'

"Shall Rome or Heathen rule in Arthur's realm?
Flash brand and lance, fall battle-axe upon helm,
Fall battle-axe, and flash brand! Let the King reign!

"Strike for the King and live! his knights have heard
That God hath told the King a secret word.
Fall battle-axe, and flash brand! Let the King reign!

"Blow trumpet! he will lift us from the dust.
Blow trumpet! live the strength, and die the lust!
Clang battle-axe, and clash brand! Let the King reign!

"Strike for the King and die! and if thou diest,
The King is King, and ever wills the highest.
Clang battle-axe, and clash brand! Let the King reign!

"Blow, for our Sun is mighty in his May!
Blow, for our Sun is mightier day by day!
Clang battle-axe, and clash brand! Let the King reign!

"The King will follow Christ, and we the King,
In whom high God hath breathed a secret thing.
Fall battle-axe, and clash brand! Let the King reign!"

So sang the knighthood, moving to their hall.
There at the banquet those great lords from Rome,
The slowly-fading mistress of the world,
Strode in and claim'd their tribute as of yore.
But Arthur spake: "Behold, for these have sworn
To wage my wars, and worship me their King;
The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And we that fight for our fair father Christ,
Seeing that ye be grown too weak and old
To drive the heathen from your Roman wall,
No tribute will we pay." So those great lords
Drew back in wrath, and Arthur strove with Rome.

The Coming of Arthur

And Arthur and his knighthood for a space
Were all one will, and thro' that strength the King
Drew in the petty princedoms under him,
Fought, and in twelve great battles overcame
The heathen hordes, and made a realm and reign'd.

The Round Table

Gareth and Lynette
The Marriage of Geraint
Geraint and Enid
Balin and Balan
Merlin and Vivien

Gareth and Lynette

Gareth and Lynette

THE last tall son of Lot and Bellicent,
And tallest, Gareth, in a showerful spring
Stared at the spate. A slender-shafted pine
Lost footing, fell, and so was whirl'd away.
"How he went down," said Gareth, "as a false knight
Or evil king before my lance, if lance
Were mine to use—O senseless cataract,
Bearing all down in thy precipitancy—
And yet thou art but swollen with cold snows
And mine is living blood. Thou dost His will,
The Maker's, and not knowest, and I that know,
Have strength and wit, in my good mother's hall
Linger with vacillating obedience,
Prison'd, and kept and coax'd and whistled to—
Since the good mother holds me still a child!
Good mother is bad mother unto me!
A worse were better; yet no worse would I.
Heaven yield her for it, but in me put force
To weary her ears with one continuous prayer,

Until she let me fly discaged to sweep
In ever-highering eagle-circles up
To the great Sun of Glory, and thence swoop
Down upon all things base, and dash them dead,
A knight of Arthur, working out his will,
To cleanse the world. Why, Gawain, when he came
With Modred hither in the summer-time,
Ask'd me to tilt with him, the proven knight.
Modred for want of worthier was the judge.
Then I so shook him in the saddle, he said,
'Thou hast half prevail'd against me,' said so—he—
Tho' Modred biting his thin lips was mute,
For he is alway sullen—what care I?"

And Gareth went, and hovering round her chair
Ask'd, "Mother, tho' ye count me still the child,
Sweet mother, do ye love the child?" She laugh'd,
"Thou art but a wild-goose to question it."
"Then mother, an ye love the child," he said,
"Being a goose and rather tame than wild,
Hear the child's story." "Yea, my well-beloved,
An 't were but of the goose and golden eggs."

And Gareth answer'd her with kindling eyes:
"Nay, nay, good mother, but this egg of mine
Was finer gold than any goose can lay;
For this an eagle, a royal eagle, laid
Almost beyond eye-reach, on such a palm

As glitters gilded in thy Book of Hours.
And there was ever haunting round the palm
A lusty youth, but poor, who often saw
The splendour sparkling from aloft, and thought,
'An I could climb and lay my hand upon it,
Then were I wealthier than a leash of kings.'
But ever when he reach'd a hand to climb,
One that had loved him from his childhood caught
And stay'd him, 'Climb not lest thou break thy neck,
I charge thee by my love,' and so the boy,
Sweet mother, neither clomb nor brake his neck,
But brake his very heart in pining for it,
And past away."

To whom the mother said,
" True love, sweet son, had risk'd himself and climb'd,
And handed down the golden treasure to him."

And Gareth answer'd her with kindling eyes:
" Gold? said I gold?—ay then, why he, or she,
Or whosoe'er it was, or half the world
Had ventured—*had* the thing I spake of been
Mere gold—but this was all of that true steel
Whereof they forged the brand Excalibur,
And lightnings play'd about it in the storm,
And all the little fowl were flurried at it,
And there were cries and clashings in the nest,
That sent him from his senses. Let me go."

Then Bellicent bemoan'd herself and said:
"Hast thou no pity upon my loneliness?
Lo, where thy father Lot beside the hearth
Lies like a log, and all but smoulder'd out!
For ever since when traitor to the King
He fought against him in the barons' war,
And Arthur gave him back his territory,
His age hath slowly droopt, and now lies there
A yet-warm corpse, and yet unburiable,
No more; nor sees, nor hears, nor speaks, nor knows.
And both thy brethren are in Arthur's hall,
Albeit neither loved with that full love
I feel for thee, nor worthy such a love.
Stay therefore thou; red berries charm the bird,
And thee, mine innocent, the jousts, the wars,
Who never knewest finger-ache, nor pang
Of wrench'd or broken limb—an often chance
In those brain-stunning shocks, and tourney-falls,
Frights to my heart. But stay; follow the deer
By these tall firs and our fast-falling burns;
So make thy manhood mightier day by day.
Sweet is the chase; and I will seek thee out
Some comfortable bride and fair, to grace
Thy climbing life, and cherish my prone year,
Till falling into Lot's forgetfulness
I know not thee, myself, nor anything.
Stay, my best son! ye are yet more boy than man."

Then Gareth: " An ye hold me yet for child,
Hear yet once more the story of the child.
For, mother, there was once a king, like ours.
The prince his heir, when tall and marriageable,
Ask'd for a bride; and thereupon the king
Set two before him. One was fair, strong, arm'd—
But to be won by force—and many men
Desired her; one, good lack, no man desired.
And these were the conditions of the king:
That save he won the first by force, he needs
Must wed that other, whom no man desired,
A red-faced bride who knew herself so vile
That evermore she long'd to hide herself,
Nor fronted man or woman, eye to eye—
Yea—some she cleaved to, but they died of her.
And one—they call'd her Fame; and one—O mother,
How can ye keep me tether'd to you?—Shame.
Man am I grown, a man's work must I do.
Follow the deer? follow the Christ, the King,
Live pure, speak true, right wrong, follow the King—
Else, wherefore born? "

To whom the mother said:
" Sweet son, for there be many who deem him not,
Or will not deem him, wholly proven king—
Albeit in mine own heart I knew him King
When I was frequent with him in my youth,
And heard him kingly speak, and doubted him

No more than he, himself; but felt him mine,
Of closest kin to me. Yet —wilt thou leave
Thine easeful biding here, and risk thine all,
Life, limbs, for one that is not proven king?
Stay, till the cloud that settles round his birth
Hath lifted but a little. Stay, sweet son."

And Gareth answer'd quickly: "Not an hour,
So that ye yield me—I will walk thro' fire,
Mother, to gain it—your full leave to go.
Not proven, who swept the dust of ruin'd Rome
From off the threshold of the realm, and crush'd
The idolaters, and made the people free?
Who should be king save him who makes us free?"

So when the Queen, who long had sought in vain
To break him from the intent to which he grew,
Found her son's will unwaveringly one,
She answer'd craftily: "Will ye walk thro' fire?
Who walks thro' fire will hardly heed the smoke.
Ay, go then, an ye must; only one proof,
Before thou ask the King to make thee knight,
Of thine obedience and thy love to me,
Thy mother,—I demand."

And Gareth cried:
"A hard one, or a hundred, so I go.
Nay—quick! the proof to prove me to the quick!"

But slowly spake the mother looking at him:
" Prince, thou shalt go disguised to Arthur's hall,
And hire thyself to serve for meats and drinks
Among the scullions and the kitchen-knaves,
And those that hand the dish across the bar.
Nor shalt thou tell thy name to any one.
And thou shalt serve a twelvemonth and a day."

For so the Queen believed that when her son
Beheld his only way to glory lead
Low down thro' villain kitchen-vassalage,
Her own true Gareth was too princely-proud
To pass thereby; so should he rest with her,
Closed in her castle from the sound of arms.

Silent awhile was Gareth, then replied:
" The thrall in person may be free in soul,
And I shall see the jousts. Thy son am I,
And, since thou art my mother, must obey.
I therefore yield me freely to thy will;
For hence will I, disguised, and hire myself
To serve with scullions and with kitchen-knaves;
Nor tell my name to any—no, not the King."

Gareth awhile linger'd. The mother's eye
Full of the wistful fear that he would go,
And turning toward him wheresoe'er he turn'd,
Perplext his outward purpose, till an hour
When, waken'd by the wind which with full voice

Swept bellowing thro' the darkness on to dawn,
He rose, and out of slumber calling two
That still had tended on him from his birth,
Before the wakeful mother heard him, went.

The three were clad like tillers of the soil.
Southward they set their faces. The birds made
Melody on branch and melody in mid air.
The damp hill-slopes were quicken'd into green,
And the live green had kindled into flowers,
For it was past the time of Easter-day.

So, when their feet were planted on the plain
That broaden'd toward the base of Camelot,
Far off they saw the silver-misty morn
Rolling her smoke about the royal mount,
That rose between the forest and the field.
At times the summit of the high city flash'd;
At times the spires and turrets half-way down
Prick'd thro' the mist; at times the great gate shone
Only, that open'd on the field below;
Anon, the whole fair city had disappear'd.

Then those who went with Gareth were amazed,
One crying, "Let us go no further, lord;
Here is a city of enchanters, built
By fairy kings." The second echo'd him,
"Lord, we have heard from our wise man at home
To northward, that this king is not the King,

But only changeling out of Fairyland,
Who drave the heathen hence by sorcery
And Merlin's glamour." Then the first again,
"Lord, there is no such city anywhere,
But all a vision."

Gareth answer'd them
With laughter, swearing he had glamour enow
In his own blood, his princedom, youth, and hopes,
To plunge old Merlin in the Arabian sea;
So pushed them all unwilling toward the gate.
And there was no gate like it under heaven.
For barefoot on the keystone, which was lined
And rippled like an ever-fleeting wave,
The Lady of the Lake stood; all her dress
Wept from her sides as water flowing away;
But like the cross her great and goodly arms
Stretch'd under all the cornice and upheld.
And drops of water fell from either hand;
And down from one a sword was hung, from one
A censer, either worn with wind and storm;
And o'er her breast floated the sacred fish;
And in the space to left of her, and right,
Were Arthur's wars in weird devices done,
New things and old co-twisted, as if Time
Were nothing, so inveterately that men
Were giddy gazing there; and over all

High on the top were those three queens, the friends
Of Arthur, who should help him at his need.

Then those with Gareth for so long a space
Stared at the figures that at last it seem'd
The dragon-boughts and elvish emblemings
Began to move, seethe, twine, and curl. They call'd
To Gareth, "Lord, the gateway is alive."

And Gareth likewise on them fixt his eyes
So long that even to him they seem'd to move.
Out of the city a blast of music peal'd.
Back from the gate started the three, to whom
From out thereunder came an ancient man,
Long-bearded, saying, "Who be ye, my sons?"

Then Gareth: "We be tillers of the soil,
Who leaving share in furrow come to see
The glories of our King; but these, my men—
Your city moved so weirdly in the mist—
Doubt if the King be king at all, or come
From Fairyland; and whether this be built
By magic, and by fairy kings and queens;
Or whether there be any city at all,
Or all a vision; and this music now
Hath scared them both, but tell thou these the truth."

Then that old Seer made answer, playing on him
And saying: "Son, I have seen the good ship sail

Keel upward, and mast downward, in the heavens,
And solid turrets topsy-turvy in air;
And here is truth, but an it please thee not,
Take thou the truth as thou hast told it me.
For truly, as thou sayest, a fairy king
And fairy queens have built the city, son;
They came from out a sacred mountain-cleft
Toward the sunrise, each with harp in hand,
And built it to the music of their harps.
And, as thou sayest, it is enchanted, son,
For there is nothing in it as it seems
Saving the King; tho' some there be that hold
The King a shadow, and the city real.
Yet take thou heed of him, for, so thou pass
Beneath this archway, then wilt thou become
A thrall to his enchantments, for the King
Will bind thee by such vows as is a shame
A man should not be bound by, yet the which
No man can keep; but, so thou dread to swear,
Pass not beneath this gateway, but abide
Without, among the cattle of the field.
For an ye heard a music, like enow
They are building still, seeing the city is built
To music, therefore never built at all,
And therefore built for ever."

Gareth spake
Anger'd: " Old master, reverence thine own beard

That looks as white as utter truth, and seems
Wellnigh as long as thou art statured tall!
Why mockest thou the stranger that hath been
To thee fair-spoken?"

But the Seer replied:
"Know ye not then the Riddling of the Bards:
'Confusion, and illusion, and relation,
Elusion, and occasion, and evasion'?
I mock thee not but as thou mockest me,
And all that see thee, for thou art not who
Thou seemest, but I know thee who thou art.
And now thou goest up to mock the King,
Who cannot brook the shadow of any lie."

Unmockingly the mocker ending here
Turn'd to the right, and past along the plain;
Whom Gareth looking after said: "My men,
Our one white lie sits like a little ghost
Here on the threshold of our enterprise.
Let love be blamed for it, not she, nor I.
Well, we will make amends."

With all good cheer
He spake and laugh'd, then enter'd with his twain
Camelot, a city of shadowy palaces
And stately, rich in emblem and the work
Of ancient kings who did their days in stone;

Which Merlin's hand, the Mage at Arthur's court,
Knowing all arts, had touch'd, and everywhere,
At Arthur's ordinance, tipt with lessening peak
And pinnacle, and had made it spire to heaven.
And ever and anon a knight would pass
Outward, or inward to the hall; his arms
Clash'd, and the sound was good to Gareth's ear.
And out of bower and casement shyly glanced
Eyes of pure women, wholesome stars of love;
And all about a healthful people stept
As in the presence of a gracious king.

Then into hall Gareth ascending heard
A voice, the voice of Arthur, and beheld
Far over heads in that long-vaulted hall
The splendour of the presence of the King
Throned, and delivering doom—and look'd no more—
But felt his young heart hammering in his ears,
And thought, "For this half-shadow of a lie
The truthful King will doom me when I speak."
Yet pressing on, tho' all in fear to find
Sir Gawain or Sir Modred, saw nor one
Nor other, but in all the listening eyes
Of those tall knights that ranged about the throne
Clear honour shining like the dewy star
Of dawn, and faith in their great King, with pure
Affection, and the light of victory,
And glory gain'd, and evermore to gain.

Then came a widow crying to the King:
"A boon, Sir King! Thy father, Uther, reft
From my dead lord a field with violence;
For howsoe'er at first he proffer'd gold,
Yet, for the field was pleasant in our eyes,
We yielded not; and then he reft us of it
Perforce and left us neither gold nor field."

Said Arthur, "Whether would ye? gold or field?"
To whom the woman weeping, "Nay, my lord,
The field was pleasant in my husband's eye."

And Arthur: "Have thy pleasant field again,
And thrice the gold for Uther's use thereof,
According to the years. No boon is here,
But justice, so thy say be proven true.
Accursed, who from the wrongs his father did
Would shape himself a right!"

And while she past,
Came yet another widow crying to him:
"A boon, Sir King! Thine enemy, King, am I.
With thine own hand thou slewest my dear lord,
A knight of Uther in the barons' war,
When Lot and many another rose and fought
Against thee, saying thou wert basely born.
I held with these, and loathe to ask thee aught.
Yet lo! my husband's brother had my son

Thrall'd in his castle, and hath starved him dead,
And standeth seized of that inheritance
Which thou that slewest the sire hast left the son.
So, tho' I scarce can ask it thee for hate,
Grant me some knight to do the battle for me,
Kill the foul thief, and wreak me for my son."

Then strode a good knight forward, crying to him,
"A boon, Sir King! I am her kinsman, I.
Give me to right her wrong, and slay the man."

Then came Sir Kay, the seneschal, and cried,
"A boon, Sir King! ev'n that thou grant her none,
This railer, that hath mock'd thee in full hall—
None; or the wholesome boon of gyve and gag."

But Arthur: "We sit King, to help the wrong'd
Thro' all our realm. The woman loves her lord.
Peace to thee, woman, with thy loves and hates!
The kings of old had doom'd thee to the flames;
Aurelius Emrys would have scourged thee dead,
And Uther slit thy tongue; but get thee hence—
Lest that rough humour of the kings of old
Return upon me! Thou that art her kin,
Go likewise; lay him low and slay him not,
But bring him here, that I may judge the right,
According to the justice of the King.
Then, be he guilty, by that deathless King
Who lived and died for men, the man shall die."

Then came in hall the messenger of Mark,
A name of evil savour in the land,
The Cornish king. In either hand he bore
What dazzled all, and shone far-off as shines
A field of charlock in the sudden sun
Between two showers, a cloth of palest gold,
Which down he laid before the throne, and knelt,
Delivering that his lord, the vassal king,
Was ev'n upon his way to Camelot;
For having heard that Arthur of his grace
Had made his goodly cousin Tristram knight,
And, for himself was of the greater state,
Being a king, he trusted his liege-lord
Would yield him this large honor all the more;
So pray'd him well to accept this cloth of gold,
In token of true heart and fealty.

Then Arthur cried to rend the cloth, to rend
In pieces, and so cast it on the hearth.
An oak-tree smoulder'd there. "The goodly knight!
What! shall the shield of Mark stand among these?"
For, midway down the side of that long hall,
A stately pile,—whereof along the front,
Some blazon'd, some but carven, and some blank,
There ran a treble range of stony shields,—
Rose, and high-arching overbrow'd the hearth.
And under every shield a knight was named;
For this was Arthur's custom in his hall:

When some good knight had done one noble deed,
His arms were carven only; but if twain,
His arms were blazon'd also; but if none,
The shield was blank and bare, without a sign
Saving the name beneath. And Gareth saw
The shield of Gawain blazon'd rich and bright,
And Modred's blank as death; and Arthur cried
To rend the cloth and cast it on the hearth.

"More like are we to reave him of his crown
Than make him knight because men call him king.
The kings we found, ye know we stay'd their hands
From war among themselves, but left them kings;
Of whom were any bounteous, merciful,
Truth-speaking, brave, good livers, them we enroll'd
Among us, and they sit within our hall.
But Mark hath tarnish'd the great name of king,
As Mark would sully the low state of churl;
And, seeing he hath sent us cloth of gold,
Return, and meet, and hold him from our eyes,
Lest we should lap him up in cloth of lead,
Silenced for ever—craven—a man of plots,
Craft, poisonous counsels, wayside ambushings—
No fault of thine; let Kay the seneschal
Look to thy wants, and send thee satisfied—
Accursed, who strikes nor lets the hand be seen!"

And many another suppliant crying came

With noise of ravage wrought by beast and man,
And evermore a knight would ride away.

Last, Gareth leaning both hands heavily
Down on the shoulders of the twain, his men,
Approach'd between them toward the King, and ask'd,
"A boon, Sir King,"—his voice was all ashamed,—
"For see ye not how weak and hunger-worn
I seem—leaning on these? grant me to serve
For meat and drink among thy kitchen-knaves
A twelvemonth and a day, nor seek my name.
Hereafter I will fight."

To him the King:
"A goodly youth and worth a goodlier boon!
But so thou wilt no goodlier, then must Kay,
The master of the meats and drinks, be thine."

He rose and past; then Kay, a man of mien
Wan-sallow as the plant that feels itself
Root-bitten by white lichen:

"Lo ye now!
This fellow hath broken from some abbey, where,
God wot, he had not beef and brewis enow,
However that might chance! but an he work,
Like any pigeon will I cram his crop,
And sleeker shall he shine than any hog."

Then Lancelot standing near: "Sir Seneschal,
Sleuth-hound thou knowest, and gray, and all the
hounds;
A horse thou knowest, a man thou dost not know:
Broad brows and fair, a fluent hair and fine,
High nose, a nostril large and fine, and hands
Large, fair, and fine!—Some young lad's mystery—
But, or from sheepcot or king's hall, the boy
Is noble-natured. Treat him with all grace,
Lest he should come to shame thy judging of him."

Then Kay: "What murmurest thou of mystery?
Think ye this fellow will poison the King's dish?
Nay, for he spake too fool-like—mystery!
Tut, an the lad were noble, he had ask'd
For horse and armour. Fair and fine, forsooth!
Sir Fine-face, Sir Fair-hands? but see thou to it
That thine own fineness, Lancelot, some fine day
Undo thee not—and leave my man to me."

So Gareth all for glory underwent
The sooty yoke of kitchen-vassalage,
Ate with young lads his portion by the door,
And couch'd at night with grimy kitchen-knaves.
And Lancelot ever spake him pleasantly,
But Kay the seneschal, who loved him not,
Would hustle and harry him, and labour him
Beyond his comrade of the hearth, and set

To turn the broach, draw water, or hew wood,
Or grosser tasks; and Gareth bow'd himself
With all obedience to the King, and wrought
All kind of service with a noble ease
That graced the lowliest act in doing it.
And when the thralls had talk among themselves,
And one would praise the love that linkt the King
And Lancelot—how the King had saved his life
In battle twice, and Lancelot once the King's—
For Lancelot was the first in tournament,
But Arthur mightiest on the battle-field—
Gareth was glad. Or if some other told
How once the wandering forester at dawn,
Far over the blue tarns and hazy seas,
On Caer-Eryri's highest found the King,
A naked babe, of whom the Prophet spake,
" He passes to the Isle Avilion,
He passes and is heal'd and cannot die "—
Gareth was glad. But if their talk were foul,
Then would he whistle rapid as any lark,
Or carol some old roundelay, and so loud
That first they mock'd, but, after, reverenced him.
Or Gareth, telling some prodigious tale
Of knights who sliced a red life-bubbling way
Thro' twenty folds of twisted dragon, held
All in a gap-mouth'd circle his good mates
Lying or sitting round him, idle hands,
Charm'd; till Sir Kay, the seneschal, would come

Blustering upon them, like a sudden wind
Among dead leaves, and drive them all apart.
Or when the thralls had sport among themselves,
So there were any trial of mastery,
He, by two yards in casting bar or stone,
Was counted best; and if there chanced a joust,
So that Sir Kay nodded him leave to go,
Would hurry thither, and when he saw the knights
Clash like the coming and retiring wave,
And the spear spring, and good horse reel, the boy
Was half beyond himself for ecstasy.

So for a month he wrought among the thralls;
But in the weeks that follow'd, the good Queen,
Repentant of the word she made him swear,
And saddening in her childless castle, sent,
Between the in-crescent and de-crescent moon,
Arms for her son, and loosed him from his vow.

This, Gareth hearing from a squire of Lot
With whom he used to play at tourney once,
When both were children, and in lonely haunts
Would scratch a ragged oval on the sand,
And each at either dash from either end—
Shame never made girl redder than Gareth joy.
He laugh'd, he sprang. "Out of the smoke, at once
I leap from Satan's foot to Peter's knee—
These news be mine, none other's—nay, the King's—

Descend into the city;" whereon he sought
The King alone, and found, and told him all.

"I have stagger'd thy strong Gawain in a tilt
For pastime; yea, he said it; joust can I.
Make me thy knight—in secret! let my name
Be hidd'n, and give me the first quest, I spring
Like flame from ashes."

Here the King's calm eye
Fell on, and check'd, and made him flush, and bow
Lowly, to kiss his hand, who answer'd him:
"Son, the good mother let me know thee here,
And sent her wish that I would yield thee thine.
Make thee my knight? my knights are sworn to vows
Of utter hardihood, utter gentleness,
And, loving, utter faithfulness in love,
And uttermost obedience to the King."

Then Gareth, lightly springing from his knees:
"My King, for hardihood I can promise thee.
For uttermost obedience make demand
Of whom ye gave me to, the Seneschal,
No mellow master of the meats and drinks!
And as for love, God wot, I love not yet,
But love I shall, God willing."

And the King:
"Make thee my knight in secret? yea, but he,

Our noblest brother, and our truest man,
And one with me in all, he needs must know."

"Let Lancelot know, my King, let Lancelot know,
Thy noblest and thy truest!"

And the King:
"But wherefore would ye men should wonder at you?
Nay, rather for the sake of me, their King,
And the deed's sake my knighthood do the deed,
Than to be noised of."

Merrily Gareth ask'd:
"Have I not earn'd my cake in baking of it?
Let be my name until I make my name!
My deeds will speak; it is but for a day."
So with a kindly hand on Gareth's arm
Smiled the great King, and half-unwillingly
Loving his lusty youthhood yielded to him.
Then, after summoning Lancelot privily:
"I have given him the first quest; he is not proven.
Look therefore, when he calls for this in hall,
Thou get to horse and follow him far away.
Cover the lions on thy shield, and see,
Far as thou mayest, he be nor ta'en nor slain."

Then that same day there past into the hall
A damsel of high lineage, and a brow

May-blossom, and a cheek of apple-blossom,
Hawk-eyes; and lightly was her slender nose
Tip-tilted like the petal of a flower.
She into hall past with her page and cried:

"O King, for thou hast driven the foe without,
See to the foe within! bridge, ford, beset
By bandits, every one that owns a tower
The lord for half a league. Why sit ye there?
Rest would I not, Sir King, an I were king,
Till ev'n the lonest hold were all as free
From cursed bloodshed as thine altar-cloth
From that best blood it is a sin to spill."

"Comfort thyself," said Arthur, "I nor mine
Rest; so my knighthood keep the vows they swore,
The wastest moorland of our realm shall be
Safe, damsel, as the centre of this hall.
What is thy name? thy need?"

"My name?" she said—
"Lynette, my name; noble; my need, a knight
To combat for my sister, Lyonors,
A lady of high lineage, of great lands,
And comely, yea, and comelier than myself.
She lives in Castle Perilous. A river
Runs in three loops about her living-place;
And o'er it are three passings, and three knights

Defend the passings, brethren, and a fourth,
And of that four the mightiest, holds her stay'd
In her own castle, and so besieges her
To break her will, and make her wed with him;
And but delays his purport till thou send
To do the battle with him thy chief man,
Sir Lancelot, whom he trusts to overthrow,
Then wed, with glory; but she will not wed
Save whom she loveth, or a holy life.
Now therefore have I come for Lancelot."

Then Arthur mindful of Sir Gareth ask'd:
"Damsel, ye know this Order lives to crush
All wrongers of the realm. But say, these four,
Who be they? What the fashion of the men?"

"They be of foolish fashion, O Sir King,
The fashion of that old knight-errantry
Who ride abroad, and do but what they will;
Courteous or bestial from the moment, such
As have nor law nor king; and three of these
Proud in their fantasy call themselves the Day,
Morning-Star, and Noon-Sun, and Evening-Star,
Being strong fools; and never a whit more wise
The fourth, who alway rideth arm'd in black,
A huge man-beast of boundless savagery.
He names himself the Night and oftener Death.
And wears a helmet mounted with a skull,

And bears a skeleton figured on his arms,
To show that who may slay or scape the three,
Slain by himself, shall enter endless night.
And all these four be fools, but mighty men,
And therefore am I come for Lancelot."

Hereat Sir Gareth call'd from where he rose,
A head with kindling eyes above the throng,
"A boon, Sir King — this quest!" then — for he
mark'd
Kay near him groaning like a wounded bull—
"Yea, King, thou knowest thy kitchen-knave am I,
And mighty thro' thy meats and drinks am I,
And I can topple over a hundred such.
Thy promise, King," and Arthur glancing at him,
Brought down a momentary brow. "Rough, sudden,
And pardonable, worthy to be knight—
Go therefore," and all hearers were amazed.

But on the damsel's forehead shame, pride, wrath
Slew the May-white. She lifted either arm,
"Fie on thee, King! I ask'd for thy chief knight,
And thou hast given me but a kitchen-knave."
Then ere a man in hall could stay her, turn'd,
Fled down the lane of access to the King,
Took horse, descended the slope street, and past
The weird white gate, and paused without, beside
The field of tourney, murmuring "kitchen-knave!"

Now two great entries open'd from the hall,
At one end one that gave upon a range
Of level pavement where the King would pace
At sunrise, gazing over plain and wood;
And down from this a lordly stairway sloped
Till lost in blowing trees and tops of towers;
And out by this main doorway past the King.
But one was counter to the hearth, and rose
High that the highest-crested helm could ride
Therethro' nor graze; and by this entry fled
The damsel in her wrath, and on to this
Sir Gareth strode, and saw without the door
King Arthur's gift, the worth of half a town,
A war-horse of the best, and near it stood
The two that out of north had follow'd him.
This bare a maiden shield, a casque; that held
The horse, the spear; whereat Sir Gareth loosed
A cloak that dropt from collar-bone to heel,
A cloth of roughest web, and cast it down,
And from it, like a fuel-smother'd fire
That lookt half-dead, brake bright, and flash'd as those
Dull-coated things, that making slide apart
Their dusk wing-cases, all beneath there burns
A jewell'd harness, ere they pass and fly.
So Gareth ere he parted flash'd in arms.
Then as he donn'd the helm, and took the shield
And mounted horse and graspt a spear, of grain
Storm-strengthen'd on a windy site, and tipt

With trenchant steel, around him slowly prest
The people, while from out of kitchen came
The thralls in throng, and seeing who had work'd
Lustier than any, and whom they could but love,
Mounted in arms, threw up their caps and cried,
"God bless the King, and all his fellowship!"
And on thro' lanes of shouting Gareth rode
Down the slope street, and past without the gate.

So Gareth past with joy; but as the cur
Pluckt from the cur he fights with, ere his cause
Be cool'd by fighting, follows, being named,
His owner, but remembers all, and growls
Remembering, so Sir Kay beside the door
Mutter'd in scorn of Gareth whom he used
To harry and hustle.

"Bound upon a quest
With horse and arms—the King hath past his time—
My scullion knave! Thralls, to your work again,
For an your fire be low ye kindle mine!
Will there be dawn in West and eve in East?
Begone!—my knave!—belike and like enow
Some old head-blow not heeded in his youth
So shook his wits they wander in his prime—
Crazed! How the villain lifted up his voice,
Nor shamed to bawl himself a kitchen-knave!
Tut, he was tame and meek enow with me,

Till peacock'd up with Lancelot's noticing.
Well—I will after my loud knave, and learn
Whether he know me for his master yet.
Out of the smoke he came, and so my lance
Hold, by God's grace, he shall into the mire—
Thence, if the King awaken from his craze,
Into the smoke again."

But Lancelot said:
"Kay, wherefore wilt thou go against the King,
For that did never he whereon ye rail,
But ever meekly served the King in thee?
Abide; take counsel, for this lad is great
And lusty, and knowing both of lance and sword."
"Tut, tell not me," said Kay, "ye are overfine
To mar stout knaves with foolish courtesies;"
Then mounted, on thro' silent faces rode
Down the slope city, and out beyond the gate.

But by the field of tourney lingering yet
Mutter'd the damsel; "Wherefore did the King
Scorn me? for, were Sir Lancelot lackt, at least
He might have yielded to me one of those
Who tilt for lady's love and glory here,
Rather than—O sweet heaven! O fie upon him!—
His kitchen-knave."

To whom Sir Gareth drew—
And there were none but few goodlier than he—

Shining in arms, "Damsel, the quest is mine.
Lead, and I follow." She thereat, as one
That smells a foul-flesh'd agaric in the holt,
And deems it carrion of some woodland thing,
Or shrew or weasel, nipt her slender nose
With petulant thumb and finger, shrilling, "Hence!
Avoid, thou smellest all of kitchen-grease.
And look who comes behind;" for there was Kay.
"Knowest thou not me? thy master? I am Kay.
We lack thee by the hearth."

And Gareth to him,
"Master no more! too well I know thee, ay—
The most ungentle knight in Arthur's hall."
"Have at thee then," said Kay; they shock'd, and Kay
Fell shoulder-slipt, and Gareth cried again,
"Lead, and I follow," and fast away she fled.

But after sod and shingle ceased to fly
Behind her, and the heart of her good horse
Was nigh to burst with violence of the beat,
Perforce she stay'd, and overtaken spoke:

"What doest thou, scullion, in my fellowship?
Deem'st thou that I accept thee aught the more
Or love thee better, that by some device
Full cowardly, or by mere unhappiness,
Thou hast overthrown and slain thy master—thou!—

Dish-washer and broach-turner, loon!—to me
Thou smellest all of kitchen as before."

"Damsel," Sir Gareth answer'd gently, "say
Whate'er ye will, but whatsoe'er ye say,
I leave not till I finish this fair quest,
Or die therefore."

"Ay, wilt thou finish it?
Sweet lord, how like a noble knight he talks!
The listening rogue hath caught the manner of it.
But, knave, anon thou shalt be met with, knave,
And then by such a one that thou for all
The kitchen brewis that was ever supt
Shalt not once dare to look him in the face."

"I shall assay," said Gareth with a smile
That madden'd her, and away she flash'd again
Down the long avenues of a boundless wood;
And Gareth following was again beknaved:

"Sir Kitchen-knave, I have miss'd the only way
Where Arthur's men are set along the wood;
The wood is nigh as full of thieves as leaves.
If both be slain, I am rid of thee; but yet,
Sir Scullion, canst thou use that spit of thine?
Fight, an thou canst; I have miss'd the only way."

So till the dusk that follow'd evensong

Rode on the two, reviler and reviled;
Then after one long slope was mounted, saw,
Bowl-shaped, thro' tops of many thousand pines
A gloomy-gladed hollow slowly sink
To westward—in the deeps whereof a mere,
Round as the red eye of an eagle-owl,
Under the half-dead sunset glared; and shouts
Ascended, and there brake a servingman
Flying from out of the black wood, and crying,
"They have bound my lord to cast him in the mere."
Then Gareth, "Bound am I to right the wrong'd,
But straitlier bound am I to bide with thee."
And when the damsel spake contemptuously,
"Lead, and I follow," Gareth cried again,
"Follow, I lead!" so down among the pines
He plunged; and there, black-shadow'd nigh the mere,
And mid-thigh-deep in bulrushes and reed,
Saw six tall men haling a seventh along,
A stone about his neck to drown him in it.
Three with good blows he quieted, but three
Fled thro' the pines; and Gareth loosed the stone
From off his neck, then in the mere beside
Tumbled it; oilily bubbled up the mere.
Last, Gareth loosed his bonds and on free feet
Set him, a stalwart baron, Arthur's friend.

"Well that ye came, or else these caitiff rogues
Had wreak'd themselves on me; good cause is theirs

To hate me, for my wont hath ever been
To catch my thief, and then like vermin here
Drown him, and with a stone about his neck;
And under this wan water many of them
Lie rotting, but at night let go the stone,
And rise, and flickering in a grimly light
Dance on the mere. Good now, ye have saved a life
Worth somewhat as the cleanser of this wood,
And fain would I reward thee worshipfully.
What guerdon will ye?"

Gareth sharply spake:
"None! for the deed's sake have I done the deed,
In uttermost obedience to the King.
But wilt thou yield this damsel harbourage?"

Whereat the baron saying, "I well believe
You be of Arthur's Table," a light laugh
Broke from Lynette: "Ay, truly of a truth,
And in a sort, being Arthur's kitchen-knave!—
But deem not I accept thee aught the more,
Scullion, for running sharply with thy spit
Down on a rout of craven foresters.
A thresher with his flail had scatter'd them.
Nay—for thou smellest of the kitchen still.
But an this lord will yield us harbourage,
Well."

So she spake. A league beyond the wood,
All in a full-fair manor and a rich,
His towers, where that day a feast had been
Held in high hall, and many a viand left,
And many a costly cate, received the three.
And there they placed a peacock in his pride
Before the damsel, and the baron set
Gareth beside her, but at once she rose.

"Meseems, that here is much discourtesy,
Setting this knave, Lord Baron, at my side.
Hear me—this morn I stood in Arthur's hall,
And pray'd the King would grant me Lancelot
To fight the brotherhood of Day and Night —
The last a monster unsubduable
Of any save of him for whom I call'd—
Suddenly bawls this frontless kitchen-knave,
"The quest is mine; thy kitchen-knave am I,
And mighty thro' thy meats and drinks am I."
Then Arthur all at once gone mad replies,
"Go therefore," and so gives the quest to him—
Him—here—a villain fitter to stick swine
Than ride abroad redressing women's wrong,
Or sit beside a noble gentlewoman."

Then half-ashamed and part-amazed, the lord
Now look'd at one and now at other, left
The damsel by the peacock in his pride,

And, seating Gareth at another board,
Sat down beside him, ate and then began:

"Friend, whether thou be kitchen-knave or not,
Or whether it be the maiden's fantasy,
And whether she be mad, or else the King,
Or both or neither, or thyself be mad,
I ask not; but thou strikest a strong stroke,
For strong thou art and goodly therewithal,
And saver of my life; and therefore now,
For here be mighty men to joust with, weigh
Whether thou wilt not with thy damsel back
To crave again Sir Lancelot of the King.
Thy pardon; I but speak for thine avail,
The saver of my life."

And Gareth said,
"Full pardon, but I follow up the quest,
Despite of Day and Night and Death and Hell."

So when, next morn, the lord whose life he saved
Had, some brief space, convey'd them on their way
And left them with God-speed, Sir Gareth spake,
"Lead, and I follow." Haughtily she replied:

"I fly no more; I allow thee for an hour.
Lion and stoat have isled together, knave,
In time of flood. Nay, furthermore, methinks

Some ruth is mine for thee. Back wilt thou, fool?
For hard by here is one will overthrow
And slay thee; then will I to court again,
And shame the King for only yielding me
My champion from the ashes of his hearth."

To whom Sir Gareth answer'd courteously:
" Say thou thy say, and I will do my deed.
Allow me for mine hour, and thou wilt find
My fortunes all as fair as hers who lay
Among the ashes and wedded the King's son."

Then to the shore of one of those long loops
Wherethro' the serpent river coil'd, they came.
Rough-thicketed were the banks and steep; the stream
Full, narrow; this a bridge of single arc
Took at a leap; and on the further side
Arose a silk pavilion, gay with gold
In streaks and rays, and all Lent-lily in hue,
Save that the dome was purple, and above,
Crimson, a slender banneret fluttering.
And therebefore the lawless warrior paced
Unarm'd, and calling, " Damsel, is this he,
The champion thou hast brought from Arthur's hall,
For whom we let thee pass? " "Nay, nay," she said,
" Sir Morning-Star. The King in utter scorn
Of thee and thy much folly hath sent thee here
His kitchen-knave; and look thou to thyself.

See that he fall not on thee suddenly,
And slay thee unarm'd; he is not knight but knave."

Then at his call, "O daughters of the Dawn,
And servants of the Morning-Star, approach,
Arm me," from out the silken curtain-folds
Bare-footed and bare-headed three fair girls
In gilt and rosy raiment came. Their feet
In dewy grasses glisten'd; and the hair
All over glanced with dewdrop or with gem
Like sparkles in the stone Avanturine.
These arm'd him in blue arms, and gave a shield
Blue also, and thereon the morning star.
And Gareth silent gazed upon the knight,
Who stood a moment, ere his horse was brought,
Glorying; and in the stream beneath him shone,
Immingled with heaven's azure waveringly,
The gay pavilion and the naked feet,
His arms, the rosy raiment, and the star.

Then she that watch'd him: "Wherefore stare ye so?
Thou shakest in thy fear. There yet is time;
Flee down the valley before he get to horse.
Who will cry shame? Thou art not knight but knave."

Said Gareth: "Damsel, whether knave or knight,
Far liefer had I fight a score of times
Than hear thee so missay me and revile.

Fair words were best for him who fights for thee;
But truly foul are better, for they send
That strength of anger thro' mine arms, I know
That I shall overthrow him."

And he that bore
The star, when mounted, cried from o'er the bridge:
"A kitchen-knave, and sent in scorn of me!
Such fight not I, but answer scorn with scorn.
For this were shame to do him further wrong
Than set him on his feet, and take his horse
And arms, and so return him to the King.
Come, therefore, leave thy lady lightly, knave.
Avoid; for it beseemeth not a knave
To ride with such a lady."

"Dog, thou liest!
I spring from loftier lineage than thine own."
He spake; and all at fiery speed the two
Shock'd on the central bridge, and either spear
Bent but not brake, and either knight at once,
Hurl'd as a stone from out of a catapult
Beyond his horse's crupper and the bridge,
Fell, as if dead; but quickly rose and drew,
And Gareth lash'd so fiercely with his brand
He drave his enemy backward down the bridge,
The damsel crying, "Well-stricken, kitchen-knave!"
Till Gareth's shield was cloven; but one stroke
Laid him that clove it grovelling on the ground.

Then cried the fallen, "Take not my life; I yield."
And Gareth, "So this damsel ask it of me
Good—I accord it easily as a grace."
She reddening, "Insolent scullion! I of thee?
I bound to thee for any favour ask'd!"
"Then shall he die." And Gareth there unlaced
His helmet as to slay him, but she shriek'd,
"Be not so hardy, scullion, as to slay
One nobler than thyself." "Damsel, thy charge
Is an abounding pleasure to me. Knight,
Thy life is thine at her command. Arise
And quickly pass to Arthur's hall, and say
His kitchen-knave hath sent thee. See thou crave
His pardon for thy breaking of his laws.
Myself when I return will plead for thee.
Thy shield is mine—farewell; and, damsel, thou,
Lead, and I follow."

And fast away she fled;
Then when he came upon her, spake: "Methought,
Knave, when I watch'd thee striking on the bridge,
The savour of thy kitchen came upon me
A little faintlier; but the wind hath changed,
I scent it twenty-fold." And then she sang,
"'O morning star' (not that tall felon there
Whom thou, by sorcery or unhappiness
Or some device, hast foully overthrown),

'O morning star that smilest in the blue,
O star, my morning dream hath proven true,
Smile sweetly, thou! my love hath smiled on me.'

"But thou begone, take counsel, and away,
For hard by here is one that guards a ford—
The second brother in their fool's parable—
Will pay thee all thy wages, and to boot.
Care not for shame; thou art not knight but knave."

To whom Sir Gareth answer'd, laughingly:
"Parables? Hear a parable of the knave.
When I was kitchen-knave among the rest,
Fierce was the hearth, and one of my co-mates
Own'd a rough dog, to whom he cast his coat,
'Guard it,' and there was none to meddle with it.
And such a coat art thou, and thee the King
Gave me to guard, and such a dog am I,
To worry, and not to flee—and—knight or knave—
The knave that doth thee service as full knight
Is all as good, meseems, as any knight
Toward thy sister's freeing."

"Ay, Sir Knave!
Ay, knave, because thou strikest as a knight,
Being but knave, I hate thee all the more."

"Fair damsel, you should worship me the more,
That, being but knave, I throw thine enemies."

"Ay, ay," she said, "but thou shalt meet thy match."

So when they touch'd the second river-loop,
Huge on a huge red horse, and all in mail
Burnish'd to blinding, shone the Noonday Sun
Beyond a raging shallow. As if the flower
That blows a globe of after arrowlets
Ten-thousand-fold had grown, flash'd the fierce shield,
All sun; and Gareth's eyes had flying blots
Before them when he turn'd from watching him.
He from beyond the roaring shallow roar'd,
" What doest thou, brother, in my marches here? "
And she athwart the shallow shrill'd again,
" Here is a kitchen-knave from Arthur's hall
Hath overthrown thy brother, and hath his arms."
" Ugh! " cried the Sun, and, vizoring up a red
And cipher face of rounded foolishness,
Push'd horse across the foamings of the ford,
Whom Gareth met mid-stream; no room was there
For lance or tourney-skill. Four strokes they struck
With sword, and these were mighty; the new knight
Had fear he might be shamed; but as the Sun
Heaved up a ponderous arm to strike the fifth,
The hoof of his horse slipt in the stream, the stream
Descended, and the Sun was wash'd away.

Then Gareth laid his lance athwart the ford;

So drew him home; but he that fought no more,
As being all bone-batter'd on the rock,
Yielded, and Gareth sent him to the King.
"Myself when I return will plead for thee.
Lead, and I follow." Quietly she led.
"Hath not the good wind, damsel, changed again?"
"Nay, not a point; nor art thou victor here.
There lies a ridge of slate across the ford;
His horse thereon stumbled—ay, for I saw it.

"'O sun' (not this strong fool whom thou, Sir Knave,
Hast overthrown thro' mere unhappiness),

'O sun that wakenest all to bliss or pain,
O moon, that layest all to sleep again,
Shine sweetly; twice my love hath smiled on me.'

"What knowest thou of love-song or of love?
Nay, nay, God wot, so thou wert nobly born,
Thou hast a pleasant presence. Yea, perchance,—

"'O dewy flowers that open to the sun,
O dewy flowers that close when day is done,
Blow sweetly; twice my love hath smiled on me.'

"What knowest thou of flowers, except, belike,
To garnish meats with? hath not our good King

Who lent me thee, the flower of kitchendom,
A foolish love for flowers? what stick ye round
The pasty? wherewithal deck the boar's head?
Flowers? nay, the boar hath rosemaries and bay.

" ' O birds that warble to the morning sky,
O birds that warble as the day goes by,
Sing sweetly; twice my love hath smiled on me.'

" What knowest thou of birds, lark, mavis, merle,
Linnet? what dream ye when they utter forth
May-music growing with the growing light,
Their sweet sun-worship? these be for the snare—
So runs thy fancy—these be for the spit,
Larding and basting. See thou have not now
Larded thy last, except thou turn and fly.
There stands the third fool of their allegory."

For there beyond a bridge of treble bow,
All in a rose-red from the west, and all
Naked it seem'd, and glowing in the broad
Deep-dimpled current underneath, the knight
That named himself the Star of Evening stood.

And Gareth, " Wherefore waits the madman there
Naked in open dayshine? " " Nay," she cried,
" Not naked, only wrapt in harden'd skins
That fit him like his own; and so ye cleave
His armor off him, these will turn the blade."

Then the third brother shouted o'er the bridge,
"O brother-star, why shine ye here so low?
Thy ward is higher up; but have ye slain
The damsel's champion?" and the damsel cried:

"No star of thine, but shot from Arthur's heaven
With all disaster unto thine and thee!
For both thy younger brethren have gone down
Before this youth; and so wilt thou, Sir Star.
Art thou not old?"

"Old, damsel, old and hard,
Old, with the might and breath of twenty boys."
Said Gareth, "Old, and over-bold in brag!
But that same strength which threw the Morning Star
Can throw the Evening."

Then that other blew
A hard and deadly note upon the horn.
"Approach and arm me!" With slow steps from out
An old storm-beaten, russet, many-stain'd
Pavilion, forth a grizzled damsel came,
And arm'd him in old arms, and brought a helm
With but a drying evergreen for crest,
And gave a shield whereon the star of even
Half-tarnish'd and half-bright, his emblem, shone.
But when it glitter'd o'er the saddle-bow,
They madly hurl'd together on the bridge;

And Gareth overthrew him, lighted, drew,
There met him drawn, and overthrew him again,
But up like fire he started; and as oft
As Gareth brought him grovelling on his knees,
So many a time he vaulted up again;
Till Gareth panted hard, and his great heart,
Foredooming all his trouble was in vain,
Labour'd within him, for he seem'd as one
That all in later, sadder age begins
To war against ill uses of a life,
But these from all his life arise, and cry,
"Thou hast made us lords, and canst not put us down!"
He half despairs; so Gareth seem'd to strike
Vainly, the damsel clamouring all the while:
"Well done, knave-knight, well stricken, O good knight-knave—
O knave, as noble as any of all the knights—
Shame me not, shame me not. I have prophesied—
Strike, thou art worthy of the Table Round—
His arms are old, he trusts the harden'd skin—
Strike—strike—the wind will never change again."
And Gareth hearing ever stronglier smote,
And hew'd great pieces of his armor off him,
But lash'd in vain against the harden'd skin,
And could not wholly bring him under, more
Than loud Southwesterns, rolling ridge on ridge,
The buoy that rides at sea, and dips and springs
For ever; till at length Sir Gareth's brand

Clash'd his, and brake it utterly to the hilt.
" I have thee now;" but forth that other sprang,
And, all unknightlike, writhed his wiry arms
Around him, till he felt, despite his mail,
Strangled, but straining ev'n his uttermost
Cast, and so hurl'd him headlong o'er the bridge
Down to the river, sink or swim, and cried,
" Lead, and I follow."

But the damsel said:
" I lead no longer; ride thou at my side;
Thou art the kingliest of all kitchen-knaves.

" ' O trefoil, sparkling on the rainy plain,
O rainbow with three colours after rain,
Shine sweetly; thrice my love hath smiled on me.'

" Sir,—and, good faith, I fain had added—Knight,
But that I heard thee call thyself a knave,—
Shamed am I that I so rebuked, reviled,
Missaid thee. Noble I am, and thought the King
Scorn'd me and mine; and now thy pardon, friend,
For thou hast ever answer'd courteously,
And wholly bold thou art, and meek withal
As any of Arthur's best, but, being knave,
Hast maz'd my wit. I marvel what thou art."

" Damsel," he said, " you be not all to blame,

Saving that you mistrusted our good King
Would handle scorn, or yield you, asking, one
Not fit to cope your quest. You said your say;
Mine answer was my deed. Good sooth! I hold
He scarce is knight, yea but half-man, nor meet
To fight for gentle damsel, he, who lets
His heart be stirr'd with any foolish heat
At any gentle damsel's waywardness.
Shamed? care not! thy foul sayings fought for me;
And seeing now thy words are fair, methinks
There rides no knight, not Lancelot, his great self,
Hath force to quell me."

Nigh upon that hour
When the lone hern forgets his melancholy,
Lets down his other leg, and stretching dreams
Of goodly supper in the distant pool,
Then turn'd the noble damsel smiling at him,
And told him of a cavern hard at hand,
Where bread and baken meats and good red wine
Of Southland, which the Lady Lyonors
Had sent her coming champion, waited him.

Anon they past a narrow comb wherein
Were slabs of rock with figures, knights on horse
Sculptured, and deckt in slowly-waning hues.
"Sir Knave, my knight, a hermit once was here,
Whose holy hand hath fashion'd on the rock

The war of Time against the soul of man.
And yon four fools have suck'd their allegory
From these damp walls, and taken but the form.
Know ye not these?" and Gareth lookt and read—
In letters like to those the vexillary
Hath left crag-carven o'er the streaming Gelt—
"PHOSPHORUS," then "MERIDIES,"—"HESPERUS"—
"NOX"—"MORS," beneath five figures, armed men,
Slab after slab, their faces forward all,
And running down the Soul, a shape that fled
With broken wings, torn raiment, and loose hair,
For help and shelter to the hermit's cave.
"Follow the faces, and we find it. Look,
Who comes behind?"

For one—delay'd at first
Thro' helping back the dislocated Kay
To Camelot, then by what thereafter chanced,
The damsel's headlong error thro' the wood—
Sir Lancelot, having swum the river-loops—
His blue shield-lions cover'd—softly drew
Behind the twain, and when he saw the star
Gleam, on Sir Gareth's turning to him, cried,
"Stay, felon knight, I avenge me for my friend."
And Gareth crying prick'd against the cry;
But when they closed—in a moment—at one touch
Of that skill'd spear, the wonder of the world—
Went sliding down so easily, and fell,

That when he found the grass within his hands
He laugh'd. The laughter jarr'd upon Lynette.
Harshly she ask'd him, " Shamed and overthrown,
And tumbled back into the kitchen-knave,
Why laugh ye? that ye blew your boast in vain?"
" Nay, noble damsel, but that I, the son
Of old King Lot and good Queen Bellicent,
And victor of the bridges and the ford,
And knight of Arthur, here lie thrown by whom
I know not, all thro' mere unhappiness—
Device and sorcery and unhappiness—
Out, sword; we are thrown!" And Lancelot answer'd:
" Prince,
O Gareth—thro' the mere unhappiness
Of one who came to help thee, not to harm,
Lancelot, and all as glad to find thee whole
As on the day when Arthur knighted him."

Then Gareth, " Thou—Lancelot!—thine the hand
That threw me? An some chance to mar the boast
Thy brethren of thee make—which could not chance—
Had sent thee down before a lesser spear,
Shamed had I been, and sad—O Lancelot—thou!"

Whereat the maiden, petulant: " Lancelot,
Why came ye not, when call'd? and wherefore now
Come ye, not call'd? I gloried in my knave,
Who being still rebuked would answer still

Courteous as any knight—but now, if knight,
The marvel dies, and leaves me fool'd and trick'd,
And only wondering wherefore play'd upon;
And doubtful whether I and mine be scorn'd.
Where should be truth if not in Arthur's hall,
In Arthur's presence? Knight, knave, prince and fool,
I hate thee and forever."

And Lancelot said:
" Blessed be thou, Sir Gareth! knight art thou
To the King's best wish. O damsel, be you wise,
To call him shamed who is but overthrown?
Thrown have I been, nor once, but many a time.
Victor from vanquish'd issues at the last,
And overthrower from being overthrown.
With sword we have not striven, and thy good horse
And thou are weary; yet not less I felt
Thy manhood thro' that wearied lance of thine.
Well hast thou done; for all the stream is freed,
And thou hast wreak'd his justice on his foes,
And when reviled hast answer'd graciously,
And makest merry when overthrown. Prince, knight,
Hail, knight and prince, and of our Table Round!"

And then when turning to Lynette he told
The tale of Gareth, petulantly she said:
" Ay, well—ay, well—for worse than being fool'd
Of others, is to fool one's self. A cave,

Sir Lancelot, is hard by, with meats and drinks
And forage for the horse, and flint for fire.
But all about it flies a honeysuckle.
Seek, till we find." And when they sought and found,
Sir Gareth drank and ate, and all his life
Past into sleep; on whom the maiden gazed:
"Sound sleep be thine! sound cause to sleep hast thou.
Wake lusty! Seem I not as tender to him
As any mother? Ay, but such a one
As all day long hath rated at her child,
And vext his day, but blesses him asleep—
Good lord, how sweetly smells the honeysuckle
In the hush'd night, as if the world were one
Of utter peace, and love, and gentleness!
O Lancelot, Lancelot,"—and she clapt her hands—
"Full merry am I to find my goodly knave
Is knight and noble. See now, sworn have I,
Else yon black felon had not let me pass,
To bring thee back to do the battle with him.
Thus an thou goest, he will fight thee first;
Who doubts thee victor? so will my knight-knave
Miss the full flower of this accomplishment."

Said Lancelot: "Peradventure he you name
May know my shield. Let Gareth, an he will,
Change his for mine, and take my charger, fresh,
Not to be spurr'd, loving the battle as well

As he that rides him." "Lancelot-like," she said,
"Courteous in this, Lord Lancelot, as in all."

And Gareth, wakening, fiercely clutch'd the shield:
"Ramp, ye lance-splintering lions, on whom all spears
Are rotten sticks! ye seem agape to roar!
Yea, ramp and roar at leaving of your lord!—
Care not, good beasts, so well I care for you.
O noble Lancelot, from my hold on these
Streams virtue—fire—thro' one that will not shame
Even the shadow of Lancelot under shield.
Hence; let us go."

Silent the silent field
They traversed. Arthur's harp tho' summer-wan,
In counter motion to the clouds, allured
The glance of Gareth dreaming on his liege.
A star shot: "Lo," said Gareth, "the foe falls!"
An owl whoopt: "Hark the victor pealing there!"
Suddenly she that rode upon his left
Clung to the shield that Lancelot lent him, crying:
"Yield, yield him this again; 't is he must fight:
I curse the tongue that all thro' yesterday
Reviled thee, and hath wrought on Lancelot now
To lend thee horse and shield. Wonders ye have done,
Miracles ye cannot. Here is glory enow
In having flung the three. I see thee maim'd,
Mangled; I swear thou canst not fling the fourth."

"And wherefore, damsel? tell me all ye know.
You cannot scare me; nor rough face, or voice,
Brute bulk of limb, or boundless savagery
Appal me from the quest."

"Nay, Prince," she cried,
"God wot, I never look'd upon the face,
Seeing he never rides abroad by day,
But watch'd him have I like a phantom pass
Chilling the night; nor have I heard the voice.
Always he made his mouthpiece of a page
Who came and went, and still reported him
As closing in himself the strength of ten,
And when his anger tare him, massacring
Man, woman, lad, and girl—yea, the soft babe!
Some hold that he hath swallow'd infant flesh,
Monster! O Prince, I went for Lancelot first,
The quest is Lancelot's; give him back the shield."

Said Gareth laughing, "An he fight for this,
Belike he wins it as the better man;
Thus—and not else!"

But Lancelot on him urged
All the devisings of their chivalry
When one might meet a mightier than himself;
How best to manage horse, lance, sword, and shield,
And so fill up the gap where force might fail
With skill and fineness. Instant were his words.

Then Gareth: "Here be rules. I know but one—
To dash against mine enemy and to win.
Yet have I watch'd thee victor in the joust,
And seen thy way." "Heaven help thee!" sigh'd
Lynette.

Then for a space, and under cloud that grew
To thunder-gloom palling all stars, they rode
In converse till she made her palfrey halt,
Lifted an arm, and softly whisper'd, "There."
And all the three were silent seeing, pitch'd
Beside the Castle Perilous on flat field,
A huge pavilion like a mountain peak
Sunder the glooming crimson on the marge,
Black, with black banner, and a long black horn
Beside it hanging; which Sir Gareth graspt,
And so, before the two could hinder him,
Sent all his heart and breath thro' all the horn.
Echo'd the walls; a light twinkled; anon
Came lights and lights, and once again he blew;
Whereon were hollow tramplings up and down
And muffled voices heard, and shadows past;
Till high above him, circled with her maids,
The Lady Lyonors at a window stood,
Beautiful among lights, and waving to him
White hands and courtesy. But when the Prince
Three times had blown—after long hush—at last—
The huge pavilion slowly yielded up,

Thro' those black foldings, that which housed therein.
High on a night-black horse, in night-black arms,
With white breast-bone, and barren ribs of Death,
And crown'd with fleshless laughter—some ten steps—
In the half-light—thro' the dim dawn—advanced
The monster, and then paused, and spake no word.

But Gareth spake and all indignantly:
"Fool, for thou hast, men say, the strength of ten,
Canst thou not trust the limbs thy God hath given,
But must, to make the terror of thee more,
Trick thyself out in ghastly imageries
Of that which Life hath done with, and the clod,
Less dull than thou, will hide with mantling flowers
As if for pity?" But he spake no word;
Which set the horror higher. A maiden swoon'd;
The Lady Lyonors wrung her hands and wept,
As doom'd to be the bride of Night and Death;
Sir Gareth's head prickled beneath his helm;
And ev'n Sir Lancelot thro' his warm blood felt
Ice strike, and all that mark'd him were aghast.

At once Sir Lancelot's charger fiercely neigh'd,
And Death's dark war-horse bounded forward with him.
Then those that did not blink the terror saw
That Death was cast to ground, and slowly rose.
But with one stroke Sir Gareth split the skull.
Half fell to right and half to left and lay.

Then with a stronger buffet he clove the helm
As throughly as the skull; and out from this
Issued the bright face of a blooming boy
Fresh as a flower new-born, and crying: "Knight,
Slay me not; my three brethren bade me do it,
To make a horror all about the house,
And stay the world from Lady Lyonors.
They never dream'd the passes would be past."
Answer'd Sir Gareth graciously to one
Not many a moon his younger, "My fair child,
What madness made thee challenge the chief knight
Of Arthur's hall?" "Fair Sir, they bade me do it.
They hate the King and Lancelot, the King's friend;
They hoped to slay him somewhere on the stream,
They never dream'd the passes could be past."

Then sprang the happier day from underground;
And Lady Lyonors and her house, with dance
And revel and song, made merry over Death,
As being after all their foolish fears
And horrors only proven a blooming boy.
So large mirth lived, and Gareth won the quest.

And he that told the tale in older times
Says that Sir Gareth wedded Lyonors,
But he that told it later says Lynette.

The Marriage of Geraint

The Marriage of Geraint

THE brave Geraint, a knight of Arthur's court,
A tributary prince of Devon, one
Of that great Order of the Table Round,
Had married Enid, Yniol's only child,
And loved her as he loved the light of heaven.
And as the light of heaven varies, now
At sunrise, now at sunset, now by night
With moon and trembling stars, so loved Geraint
To make her beauty vary day by day,
In crimsons and in purples and in gems.
And Enid, but to please her husband's eye,
Who first had found and loved her in a state
Of broken fortunes, daily fronted him
In some fresh splendour; and the Queen herself,
Grateful to Prince Geraint for service done,
Loved her, and often with her own white hands
Array'd and deck'd her, as the loveliest,
Next after her own self, in all the court.
And Enid loved the Queen, and with true heart

Adored her, as the stateliest and the best
And loveliest of all women upon earth.
And seeing them so tender and so close,
Long in their common love rejoiced Geraint.
But when a rumour rose about the Queen,
Touching her guilty love for Lancelot,
Tho' yet there lived no proof, nor yet was heard
The world's loud whisper breaking into storm,
Not less Geraint believed it; and there fell
A horror on him lest his gentle wife,
Thro' that great tenderness for Guinevere,
Had suffer'd or should suffer any taint
In nature. Wherefore, going to the King,
He made this pretext, that his princedom lay
Close on the borders of a territory
Wherein were bandit earls, and caitiff knights,
Assassins, and all flyers from the hand
Of Justice, and whatever loathes a law;
And therefore, till the King himself should please
To cleanse this common sewer of all his realm,
He craved a fair permission to depart,
And there defend his marches. And the King
Mused for a little on his plea, but, last,
Allowing it, the Prince and Enid rode,
And fifty knights rode with them, to the shores
Of Severn, and they past to their own land;
Where, thinking that, if ever yet was wife
True to her lord, mine shall be so to me,

He compass'd her with sweet observances
And worship, never leaving her, and grew
Forgetful of his promise to the King,
Forgetful of the falcon and the hunt,
Forgetful of the tilt and tournament,
Forgetful of his glory and his name,
Forgetful of his princedom and its cares.
And this forgetfulness was hateful to her.
And by and by the people, when they met
In twos and threes, or fuller companies,
Began to scoff and jeer and babble of him
As of a prince whose manhood was all gone,
And molten down in mere uxoriousness.
And this she gather'd from the people's eyes;
This too the women who attired her head,
To please her, dwelling on his boundless love,
Told Enid, and they sadden'd her the more;
And day by day she thought to tell Geraint,
But could not out of bashful delicacy,
While he, that watch'd her sadden, was the more
Suspicious that her nature had a taint.

At last, it chanced that on a summer morn—
They sleeping each by either—the new sun
Beat thro' the blindless casement of the room,
And heated the strong warrior in his dreams;
Who, moving, cast the coverlet aside,
And bared the knotted column of his throat,

The massive square of his heroic breast,
And arms on which the standing muscle sloped,
As slopes a wild brook o'er a little stone,
Running too vehemently to break upon it.
And Enid woke and sat beside the couch,
Admiring him, and thought within herself,
Was ever man so grandly made as he?
Then, like a shadow, past the people's talk
And accusation of uxoriousness
Across her mind, and, bowing over him,
Low to her own heart piteously she said:

"O noble breast and all-puissant arms,
Am I the cause, I the poor cause that men
Reproach you, saying all your force is gone?
I *am* the cause, because I dare not speak
And tell him what I think and what they say.
And yet I hate that he should linger here;
I cannot love my lord and not his name.
Far liefer had I gird his harness on him,
And ride with him to battle and stand by,
And watch his mightful hand striking great blows
At caitiffs and at wrongers of the world.
Far better were I laid in the dark earth,
Not hearing any more his noble voice,
Not to be folded more in these dear arms,
And darken'd from the high light in his eyes,
Than that my lord thro' me should suffer shame.

Am I so bold, and could I so stand by,
And see my dear lord wounded in the strife,
Or maybe pierced to death before mine eyes,
And yet not dare to tell him what I think,
And how men slur him, saying all his force
Is melted into mere effeminacy?
O me, I fear that I am no true wife!"

Half inwardly, half audibly she spoke,
And the strong passion in her made her weep
True tears upon his broad and naked breast,
And these awoke him, and by great mischance
He heard but fragments of her later words,
And that she fear'd she was not a true wife.
And then he thought, "In spite of all my care,
For all my pains, poor man, for all my pains,
She is not faithful to me, and I see her
Weeping for some gay knight in Arthur's hall."
Then, tho' he loved and reverenced her too much
To dream she could be guilty of foul act,
Right thro' his manful breast darted the pang
That makes a man, in the sweet face of her
Whom he loves most, lonely and miserable.
At this he hurl'd his huge limbs out of bed,
And shook his drowsy squire awake and cried,
"My charger and her palfrey;" then to her,
"I will ride forth into the wilderness,
For, tho' it seems my spurs are yet to win,

I have not fallen so low as some would wish.
And thou, put on thy worst and meanest dress
And ride with me." And Enid ask'd, amazed,
"If Enid errs, let Enid learn her fault."
But he, "I charge thee, ask not, but obey."
Then she bethought her of a faded silk,
A faded mantle and a faded veil,
And moving toward a cedarn cabinet,
Wherein she kept them folded reverently
With sprigs of summer laid between the folds,
She took them, and array'd herself therein,
Remembering when first he came on her
Drest in that dress, and how he loved her in it,
And all her foolish fears about the dress,
And all his journey to her, as himself
Had told her, and their coming to the court.

For Arthur on the Whitsuntide before
Held court at old Caerleon upon Usk.
There on a day, he sitting high in hall,
Before him came a forester of Dean,
Wet from the woods, with notice of a hart
Taller than all his fellows, milky-white,
First seen that day; these things he told the King.
Then the good King gave order to let blow
His horns for hunting on the morrow morn,
And when the Queen petition'd for his leave
To see the hunt, allow'd it easily.

So with the morning all the court were gone.
But Guinevere lay late into the morn,
Lost in sweet dreams, and dreaming of her love
For Lancelot, and forgetful of the hunt,
But rose at last, a single maiden with her,
Took horse, and forded Usk, and gain'd the wood;
There, on a little knoll beside it, stay'd
Waiting to hear the hounds, but heard instead
A sudden sound of hoofs, for Prince Geraint,
Late also, wearing neither hunting-dress
Nor weapon save a golden-hilted brand,
Came quickly flashing thro' the shallow ford
Behind them, and so gallop'd up the knoll.
A purple scarf, at either end whereof
There swung an apple of the purest gold,
Sway'd round about him, as he gallop'd up
To join them, glancing like a dragon-fly
In summer suit and silks of holiday.
Low bow'd the tributary prince, and she,
Sweetly and statelily, and with all grace
Of womanhood and queenhood, answer'd him:
"Late, late, Sir Prince," she said, "later than we!"
"Yea, noble Queen," he answer'd, "and so late
That I but come like you to see the hunt,
Not join it." "Therefore wait with me," she said;
"For on this little knoll, if anywhere,
There is good chance that we shall hear the hounds:
Here often they break covert at our feet."

And while they listen'd for the distant hunt,
And chiefly for the baying of Cavall,
King Arthur's hound of deepest mouth, there rode
Full slowly by a knight, lady, and dwarf;
Whereof the dwarf lagg'd latest, and the knight
Had vizor up, and show'd a youthful face,
Imperious, and of haughtiest lineaments.
And Guinevere, not mindful of his face
In the King's hall, desired his name, and sent
Her maiden to demand it of the dwarf,
Who being vicious, old, and irritable,
And doubling all his master's vice of pride,
Made answer sharply that she should not know.
" Then will I ask it of himself," she said.
" Nay, by my faith, thou shalt not," cried the dwarf;
" Thou art not worthy even to speak of him;"
And when she put her horse toward the knight,
Struck at her with his whip, and she return'd
Indignant to the Queen; whereat Geraint
Exclaiming, " Surely I will learn the name,"
Made sharply to the dwarf, and ask'd it of him,
Who answer'd as before; and when the Prince
Had put his horse in motion toward the knight,
Struck at him with his whip, and cut his cheek.
The Prince's blood spirted upon the scarf,
Dyeing it; and his quick, instinctive hand
Caught at the hilt, as to abolish him:
But he, from his exceeding manfulness

And pure nobility of temperament,
Wroth to be wroth at such a worm, refrain'd
From even a word, and so returning said:

"I will avenge this insult, noble Queen,
Done in your maiden's person to yourself,
And I will track this vermin to their earths;
For tho' I ride unarm'd, I do not doubt
To find, at some place I shall come at, arms
On loan, or else for pledge; and, being found,
Then will I fight him, and will break his pride,
And on the third day will again be here,
So that I be not fallen in fight. Farewell."

"Farewell, fair Prince," answer'd the stately Queen.
"Be prosperous in this journey, as in all;
And may you light on all things that you love,
And live to wed with her whom first you love.
But ere you wed with any, bring your bride,
And I, were she the daughter of a king,
Yea, tho' she were a beggar from the hedge,
Will clothe her for her bridals like the sun."

And Prince Geraint, now thinking that he heard
The noble hart at bay, now the far horn,
A little vext at losing of the hunt,
A little at the vile occasion, rode,
By ups and downs, thro' many a grassy glade

And valley, with fixt eye following the three.
At last they issued from the world of wood,
And climb'd upon a fair and even ridge,
And show'd themselves against the sky, and sank.
And thither came Geraint, and underneath
Beheld the long street of a little town
In a long valley, on one side whereof,
White from the mason's hand, a fortress rose;
And on one side a castle in decay,
Beyond a bridge that spann'd a dry ravine.
And out of town and valley came a noise
As of a broad brook o'er a shingly bed
Brawling, or like a clamour of the rooks
At distance, ere they settle for the night.

And onward to the fortress rode the three,
And enter'd, and were lost behind the walls.
"So," thought Geraint, "I have track'd him to his earth."
And down the long street riding wearily,
Found every hostel full, and everywhere
Was hammer laid to hoof, and the hot hiss
And bustling whistle of the youth who scour'd
His master's armour; and of such a one
He ask'd, "What means the tumult in the town?"
Who told him, scouring still, "The sparrow-hawk!"
Then riding close behind an ancient churl,
Who, smitten by the dusty sloping beam,

Went sweating underneath a sack of corn,
Ask'd yet once more what meant the hubbub here?
Who answer'd gruffly, "Ugh! the sparrow-hawk!"
Then riding further past an armourer's,
Who, with back turn'd, and bow'd above his work,
Sat riveting a helmet on his knee,
He put the selfsame query, but the man
Not turning round, nor looking at him, said,
"Friend, he that labours for the sparrow-hawk
Has little time for idle questioners."
Whereat Geraint flash'd into sudden spleen:
"A thousand pips eat up your sparrow-hawk!
Tits, wrens, and all wing'd nothings peck him dead!
Ye think the rustic cackle of your bourg
The murmur of the world! What is it to me?
O wretched set of sparrows, one and all,
Who pipe of nothing but of sparrow-hawks!
Speak, if ye be not like the rest, hawk-mad,
Where can I get me harbourage for the night?
And arms, arms, arms to fight my enemy? Speak!"
Whereat the armourer turning all amazed
And seeing one so gay in purple silks,
Came forward with the helmet yet in hand
And answer'd: "Pardon me, O stranger knight;
We hold a tourney here to-morrow morn,
And there is scantly time for half the work.
Arms? truth! I know not; all are wanted here.
Harbourage? truth, good truth, I know not, save,

It may be, at Earl Yniol's, o'er the bridge
Yonder." He spoke and fell to work again.

Then rode Geraint, a little spleenful yet,
Across the bridge that spann'd the dry ravine.
There musing sat the hoary-headed Earl—
His dress a suit of fray'd magnificence,
Once fit for feasts of ceremony—and said,
" Whither, fair son ? " to whom Geraint replied,
" O friend, I seek a harbourage for the night."
Then Yniol, " Enter therefore and partake
The slender entertainment of a house
Once rich, now poor, but ever open-door'd."
" Thanks, venerable friend," replied Geraint;
" So that ye do not serve me sparrow-hawks
For supper, I will enter, I will eat
With all the passion of a twelve hours' fast."
Then sigh'd and smiled the hoary-headed Earl,
And answer'd, " Graver cause than yours is mine
To curse this hedgerow thief, the sparrow-hawk.
But in, go in; for save yourself desire it,
We will not touch upon him even in jest."

Then rode Geraint into the castle court,
His charger trampling many a prickly star
Of sprouted thistle on the broken stones.
He look'd and saw that all was ruinous.
Here stood a shatter'd archway plumed with fern;
And here had fall'n a great part of a tower,

Whole, like a crag that tumbles from the cliff,
And like a crag was gay with wilding flowers;
And high above a piece of turret stair,
Worn by the feet that now were silent, wound
Bare to the sun, and monstrous ivy-stems
Claspt the gray walls with hairy-fibred arms,
And suck'd the joining of the stones, and look'd
A knot, beneath, of snakes, aloft, a grove.

And while he waited in the castle court,
The voice of Enid, Yniol's daughter, rang
Clear thro' the open casement of the hall,
Singing; and as the sweet voice of a bird,
Heard by the lander in a lonely isle,
Moves him to think what kind of bird it is
That sings so delicately clear, and make
Conjecture of the plumage and the form,
So the sweet voice of Enid moved Geraint,
And made him like a man abroad at morn
When first the liquid note beloved of men
Comes flying over many a windy wave
To Britain, and in April suddenly
Breaks from a coppice gemm'd with green and red,
And he suspends his converse with a friend,
Or it may be the labour of his hands,
To think or say, "There is the nightingale:"
So fared it with Geraint, who thought and said,
"Here, by God's grace, is the one voice for me."

It chanced the song that Enid sang was one
Of Fortune and her wheel, and Enid sang:

"Turn, Fortune, turn thy wheel, and lower the proud;
Turn thy wild wheel thro' sunshine, storm, and cloud;
Thy wheel and thee we neither love nor hate.

"Turn, Fortune, turn thy wheel with smile or frown;
With that wild wheel we go not up or down;
Our hoard is little, but our hearts are great.

"Smile and we smile, the lords of many lands;
Frown and we smile, the lords of our own hands;
For man is man and master of his fate.

"Turn, turn thy wheel above the staring crowd;
Thy wheel and thou are shadows in the cloud;
Thy wheel and thee we neither love nor hate."

"Hark, by the bird's song ye may learn the nest,"
Said Yniol; "enter quickly." Entering then,
Right o'er a mount of newly-fallen stones,
The dusky-rafter'd many-cobwebb'd hall,
He found an ancient dame in dim brocade;
And near her, like a blossom vermeil-white,
That lightly breaks a faded flower-sheath,
Moved the fair Enid, all in faded silk,
Her daughter. In a moment thought Geraint,

"Here, by God's rood, is the one maid for me."
But none spake word except the hoary Earl:
"Enid, the good knight's horse stands in the court;
Take him to stall, and give him corn, and then
Go to the town and buy us flesh and wine;
And we will make us merry as we may.
Our hoard is little, but our hearts are great."

He spake; the Prince, as Enid past him, fain
To follow, strode a stride, but Yniol caught
His purple scarf, and held, and said, "Forbear!
Rest! the good house, tho' ruin'd, O my son,
Endures not that her guest should serve himself."
And reverencing the custom of the house
Geraint, from utter courtesy, forbore.

So Enid took his charger to the stall,
And after went her way across the bridge,
And reach'd the town, and while the Prince and Earl
Yet spoke together, came again with one,
A youth that, following with a costrel, bore
The means of goodly welcome, flesh and wine.
And Enid brought sweet cakes to make them cheer,
And, in her veil enfolded, manchet bread.
And then, because their hall must also serve
For kitchen, boil'd the flesh, and spread the board,
And stood behind, and waited on the three.
And, seeing her so sweet and serviceable,

Geraint had longing in him evermore
To stoop and kiss the tender little thumb
That crost the trencher as she laid it down.
But after all had eaten, then Geraint,
For now the wine made summer in his veins,
Let his eye rove in following, or rest
On Enid at her lowly handmaid-work,
Now here, now there, about the dusky hall;
Then suddenly addrest the hoary Earl:

"Fair host and Earl, I pray your courtesy;
This sparrow-hawk, what is he? tell me of him.
His name? but no, good faith, I will not have it;
For if he be the knight whom late I saw
Ride into that new fortress by your town,
White from the mason's hand, then have I sworn
From his own lips to have it—I am Geraint
Of Devon—for this morning when the Queen
Sent her own maiden to demand the name,
His dwarf, a vicious under-shapen thing,
Struck at her with his whip, and she return'd
Indignant to the Queen; and then I swore
That I would track this caitiff to his hold,
And fight and break his pride, and have it of him.
And all unarm'd I rode, and thought to find
Arms in your town, where all the men are mad;
They take the rustic murmur of their bourg
For the great wave that echoes round the world.

They would not hear me speak; but if ye know
Where I can light on arms, or if yourself
Should have them, tell me, seeing I have sworn
That I will break his pride and learn his name,
Avenging this great insult done the Queen."

Then cried Earl Yniol: " Art thou he indeed,
Geraint, a name far-sounded among men
For noble deeds? and truly I, when first
I saw you moving by me on the bridge,
Felt ye were somewhat, yea, and by your state
And presence might have guess'd you one of those
That eat in Arthur's hall at Camelot.
Nor speak I now from foolish flattery;
For this dear child hath often heard me praise
Your feats of arms, and often when I paused
Hath ask'd again, and ever loved to hear;
So grateful is the noise of noble deeds
To noble hearts who see but acts of wrong.
O, never yet had woman such a pair
Of suitors as this maiden; first Limours,
A creature wholly given to brawls and wine,
Drunk even when he woo'd; and be he dead
I know not, but he past to the wild land.
The second was your foe, the sparrow-hawk,
My curse, my nephew—I will not let his name
Slip from my lips if I can help it—he,
When I that knew him fierce and turbulent

Refused her to him, then his pride awoke;
And since the proud man often is the mean,
He sow'd a slander in the common ear,
Affirming that his father left him gold,
And in my charge, which was not render'd to him;
Bribed with large promises the men who served
About my person, the more easily
Because my means were somewhat broken into
Thro' open doors and hospitality;
Raised my own town against me in the night
Before my Enid's birthday, sack'd my house;
From mine own earldom foully ousted me;
Built that new fort to overawe my friends,
For truly there are those who love me yet;
And keeps me in this ruinous castle here,
Where doubtless he would put me soon to death
But that his pride too much despises me.
And I myself sometimes despise myself;
For I have let men be and have their way,
Am much too gentle, have not used my power;
Nor know I whether I be very base
Or very manful, whether very wise
Or very foolish; only this I know,
That whatsoever evil happen to me,
I seem to suffer nothing heart or limb,
But can endure it all most patiently."

" Well said, true heart," replied Geraint, " but arms,

That if the sparrow-hawk, this nephew, fight
In next day's tourney I may break his pride."

And Yniol answer'd: "Arms, indeed, but old
And rusty, old and rusty, Prince Geraint,
Are mine, and therefore, at thine asking, thine.
But in this tournament can no man tilt,
Except the lady he loves best be there.
Two forks are fixt into the meadow ground,
And over these is placed a silver wand,
And over that a golden sparrow-hawk,
The prize of beauty for the fairest there.
And this, what knight soever be in field
Lays claim to for the lady at his side,
And tilts with my good nephew thereupon,
Who being apt at arms and big of bone
Has ever won it for the lady with him,
And toppling over all antagonism
Has earn'd himself the name of sparrow-hawk.
But thou, that hast no lady, canst not fight."

To whom Geraint with eyes all bright replied,
Leaning a little toward him: "Thy leave!
Let *me* lay lance in rest, O noble host,
For this dear child, because I never saw,
Tho' having seen all beauties of our time,
Nor can see elsewhere, anything so fair.
And if I fall her name will yet remain

Untarnish'd as before; but if I live,
So aid me Heaven when at mine uttermost,
As I will make her truly my true wife!"

Then, howsoever patient, Yniol's heart
Danced in his bosom, seeing better days.
And looking round he saw not Enid there—
Who hearing her own name had stolen away—
But that old dame, to whom full tenderly
And fondling all her hand in his he said:
"Mother, a maiden is a tender thing,
And best by her that bore her understood.
Go thou to rest, but ere thou go to rest
Tell her, and prove her heart toward the Prince."

So spake the kindly-hearted Earl, and she
With frequent smile and nod departing found,
Half disarray'd as to her rest, the girl;
Whom first she kiss'd on either cheek, and then
On either shining shoulder laid a hand,
And kept her off and gazed upon her face,
And told her all their converse in the hall,
Proving her heart. But never light and shade
Coursed one another more on open ground
Beneath a troubled heaven than red and pale
Across the face of Enid hearing her;
While slowly falling as a scale that falls,
When weight is added only grain by grain,

Sank her sweet head upon her gentle breast;
Nor did she lift an eye nor speak a word,
Rapt in the fear and in the wonder of it.
So moving without answer to her rest
She found no rest, and ever fail'd to draw
The quiet night into her blood, but lay
Contemplating her own unworthiness;
And when the pale and bloodless east began
To quicken to the sun, arose, and raised
Her mother too, and hand in hand they moved
Down to the meadow where the jousts were held,
And waited there for Yniol and Geraint.

And thither came the twain, and when Geraint
Beheld her first in field, awaiting him,
He felt, were she the prize of bodily force,
Himself beyond the rest pushing could move
The Chair of Idris. Yniol's rusted arms
Were on his princely person, but thro' these
Prince-like his bearing shone; and errant knights
And ladies came, and by and by the town
Flow'd in and settling circled all the lists.
And there they fixt the forks into the ground,
And over these they placed the silver wand,
And over that the golden sparrow-hawk.
Then Yniol's nephew, after trumpet blown,
Spake to the lady with him and proclaim'd,
" Advance and take, the fairest of the fair,

What I these two years past have won for thee,
The prize of beauty." Loudly spake the Prince,
"Forbear; there is a worthier," and the knight
With some surprise and thrice as much disdain
Turn'd, and beheld the four, and all his face
Glow'd like the heart of a great fire at Yule,
So burnt he was with passion, crying out,
"Do battle for it then," no more; and thrice
They clash'd together, and thrice they brake their spears.
Then each, dishorsed and drawing, lash'd at each
So often and with such blows that all the crowd
Wonder'd, and now and then from distant walls
There came a clapping as of phantom hands.
So twice they fought, and twice they breathed, and still
The dew of their great labour and the blood
Of their strong bodies, flowing, drain'd their force.
But either's force was match'd till Yniol's cry,
"Remember that great insult done the Queen,"
Increased Geraint's, who heaved his blade aloft,
And crack'd the helmet thro', and bit the bone,
And fell'd him, and set foot upon his breast,
And said, "Thy name?" To whom the fallen man
Made answer, groaning: "Edyrn, son of Nudd!
Ashamed am I that I should tell it thee.
My pride is broken; men have seen my fall."
"Then, Edyrn, son of Nudd," replied Geraint,

" These two things shalt thou do, or else thou diest.
First, thou thyself, with damsel and with dwarf,
Shalt ride to Arthur's court and, coming there,
Crave pardon for that insult done the Queen,
And shalt abide her judgment on it; next,
Thou shalt give back their earldom to thy kin.
These two things shalt thou do, or thou shalt die."
And Edyrn answer'd, " These things will I do,
For I have never yet been overthrown,
And thou hast overthrown me, and my pride
Is broken down, for Enid sees my fall! "
And rising up he rode to Arthur's court,
And there the Queen forgave him easily.
And, being young, he changed and came to loathe
His crime of traitor, slowly drew himself
Bright from his old dark life, and fell at last
In the great battle fighting for the King.

But when the third day from the hunting-morn
Made a low splendour in the world, and wings
Moved in her ivy, Enid, for she lay
With her fair head in the dim-yellow light,
Among the dancing shadows of the birds,
Woke and bethought her of her promise given
No later than last eve to Prince Geraint—
So bent he seem'd on going the third day,
He would not leave her till her promise given—
To ride with him this morning to the court,

And there be made known to the stately Queen,
And there be wedded with all ceremony.
At this she cast her eyes upon her dress,
And thought it never yet had look'd so mean.
For as a leaf in mid-November is
To what it was in mid-October, seem'd
The dress that now she look'd on to the dress
She look'd on ere the coming of Geraint.
And still she look'd, and still the terror grew
Of that strange bright and dreadful thing, a court,
All staring at her in her faded silk;
And softly to her own sweet heart she said:

"This noble prince who won our earldom back,
So splendid in his acts and his attire,
Sweet heaven, how much I shall discredit him!
Would he could tarry with us here awhile,
But being so beholden to the Prince,
It were but little grace in any of us,
Bent as he seem'd on going this third day,
To seek a second favour at his hands.
Yet if he could but tarry a day or two,
Myself would work eye dim and finger lame
Far liefer than so much discredit him."

And Enid fell in longing for a dress
All branch'd and flower'd with gold, a costly gift
Of her good mother, given her on the night

The Marriage of Geraint

Before her birthday, three sad years ago,
That night of fire, when Edyrn sack'd their house
And scatter'd all they had to all the winds;
For while the mother show'd it, and the two
Were turning and admiring it, the work
To both appear'd so costly, rose a cry
That Edyrn's men were on them, and they fled
With little save the jewels they had on,
Which being sold and sold had bought them bread.
And Edyrn's men had caught them in their flight,
And placed them in this ruin; and she wish'd
The Prince had found her in her ancient home;
Then let her fancy flit across the past,
And roam the goodly places that she knew;
And last bethought her how she used to watch,
Near that old home, a pool of golden carp;
And one was patch'd and blurr'd and lustreless
Among his burnish'd brethren of the pool;
And half asleep she made comparison
Of that and these to her own faded self
And the gay court, and fell asleep again,
And dreamt herself was such a faded form
Among her burnish'd sisters of the pool.
But this was in the garden of a king,
And tho' she lay dark in the pool, she knew
That all was bright; that all about were birds
Of sunny plume in gilded trellis-work;
That all the turf was rich in plots that look'd

Each like a garnet or a turkis in it;
And lords and ladies of the high court went
In silver tissue talking things of state;
And children of the King in cloth of gold
Glanced at the doors or gamboll'd down the walks.
And while she thought, " They will not see me," came
A stately queen whose name was Guinevere,
And all the children in their cloth of gold
Ran to her, crying, " If we have fish at all
Let them be gold; and charge the gardeners now
To pick the faded creature from the pool,
And cast it on the mixen that it die."
And therewithal one came and seized on her,
And Enid started waking, with her heart
All overshadowed by the foolish dream,
And lo! it was her mother grasping her
To get her well awake; and in her hand
A suit of bright apparel, which she laid
Flat on the couch, and spoke exultingly:

" See here, my child, how fresh the colours look,
How fast they hold, like colours of a shell
That keeps the wear and polish of the wave.
Why not? It never yet was worn, I trow:
Look on it, child, and tell me if ye know it."

And Enid look'd, but, all confused at first,
Could scarce divide it from her foolish dream.

Then suddenly she knew it and rejoiced,
And answer'd, "Yea, I know it; your good gift,
So sadly lost on that unhappy night;
Your own good gift!" "Yea, surely," said the dame,
"And gladly given again this happy morn.
For when the jousts were ended yesterday,
Went Yniol thro' the town, and everywhere
He found the sack and plunder of our house
All scatter'd thro' the houses of the town,
And gave command that all which once was ours
Should now be ours again; and yester-eve,
While ye were talking sweetly with your Prince,
Came one with this and laid it in my hand,
For love or fear, or seeking favour of us,
Because we have our earldom back again.
And yester-eve I would not tell you of it,
But kept it for a sweet surprise at morn.
Yea, truly is it not a sweet surprise?
For I myself unwillingly have worn
My faded suit, as you, my child, have yours,
And, howsoever patient, Yniol his.
Ah, dear, he took me from a goodly house,
With store of rich apparel, sumptuous fare,
And page, and maid, and squire, and seneschal,
And pastime both of hawk and hound, and all
That appertains to noble maintenance.
Yea, and he brought me to a goodly house;
But since our fortune swerved from sun to shade,

And all thro' that young traitor, cruel need
Constrain'd us, but a better time has come.
So clothe yourself in this, that better fits
Our mended fortunes and a prince's bride;
For tho' ye won the prize of fairest fair,
And tho' I heard him call you fairest fair,
Let never maiden think, however fair,
She is not fairer in new clothes than old.
And should some great court-lady say, the Prince
Hath pick'd a ragged-robin from the hedge,
And like a madman brought her to the court,
Then were ye shamed, and, worse, might shame the Prince
To whom we are beholden; but I know,
When my dear child is set forth at her best,
That neither court nor country, tho' they sought
Thro' all the provinces like those of old
That lighted on Queen Esther, has her match."

Here ceased the kindly mother out of breath,
And Enid listen'd brightening as she lay;
Then, as the white and glittering star of morn
Parts from a bank of snow, and by and by
Slips into golden cloud, the maiden rose,
And left her maiden couch, and robed herself,
Help'd by the mother's careful hand and eye,
Without a mirror, in the gorgeous gown;
Who, after, turn'd her daughter round, and said

She never yet had seen her half so fair;
And call'd her like that maiden in the tale,
Whom Gwydion made by glamour out of flowers,
And sweeter than the bride of Cassivelaun,
Flur, for whose love the Roman Cæsar first
Invaded Britain: "But we beat him back,
As this great Prince invaded us, and we,
Not beat him back, but welcomed him with joy.
And I can scarcely ride with you to court,
For old am I, and rough the ways and wild;
But Yniol goes, and I full oft shall dream
I see my princess as I see her now,
Clothed with my gift and gay among the gay."

But while the women thus rejoiced, Geraint
Woke where he slept in the high hall, and call'd
For Enid, and when Yniol made report
Of that good mother making Enid gay
In such apparel as might well beseem
His princess, or indeed the stately Queen,
He answer'd: "Earl, entreat her by my love,
Albeit I give no reason but my wish,
That she ride with me in her faded silk."
Yniol with that hard message went; it fell
Like flaws in summer laying lusty corn;
For Enid, all abash'd she knew not why,
Dared not to glance at her good mother's face,
But silently, in all obedience,

Her mother silent too, nor helping her,
Laid from her limbs the costly-broider'd gift,
And robed them in her ancient suit again,
And so descended. Never man rejoiced
More than Geraint to greet her thus attired;
And glancing all at once as keenly at her
As careful robins eye the delver's toil,
Made her cheek burn and either eyelid fall,
But rested with her sweet face satisfied;
Then seeing cloud upon the mother's brow,
Her by both hands he caught, and sweetly said:

"O my new mother, be not wroth or grieved
At thy new son, for my petition to her.
When late I left Caerleon, our great Queen,
In words whose echo lasts, they were so sweet,
Made promise that, whatever bride I brought,
Herself would clothe her like the sun in heaven.
Thereafter, when I reach'd this ruin'd hall,
Beholding one so bright in dark estate,
I vow'd that, could I gain her, our fair Queen,
No hand but hers, should make your Enid burst
Sunlike from cloud—and likewise thought perhaps,
That service done so graciously would bind
The two together; fain I would the two
Should love each other. How can Enid find
A nobler friend? Another thought was mine:
I came among you here so suddenly

That tho' her gentle presence at the lists
Might well have served for proof that I was loved,
I doubted whether daughter's tenderness,
Or easy nature, might not let itself
Be moulded by your wishes for her weal;
Or whether some false sense in her own self
Of my contrasting brightness overbore
Her fancy dwelling in this dusky hall,
And such a sense might make her long for court
And all its perilous glories; and I thought,
That could I someway prove such force in her
Link'd with such love for me that at a word,
No reason given her, she could cast aside
A splendour dear to women, new to her,
And therefore dearer; or if not so new,
Yet therefore tenfold dearer by the power
Of intermitted usage; then I felt
That I could rest, a rock in ebbs and flows,
Fixt on her faith. Now, therefore, I do rest,
A prophet certain of my prophecy,
That never shadow of mistrust can cross
Between us. Grant me pardon for my thoughts;
And for my strange petition I will make
Amends hereafter by some gaudy-day,
When your fair child shall wear your costly gift
Beside your own warm hearth, with, on her knees,
Who knows? another gift of the high God,
Which, maybe, shall have learn'd to lisp you thanks."

He spoke; the mother smiled, but half in tears,
Then brought a mantle down and wrapt her in it,
And claspt and kiss'd her, and they rode away.

Now thrice that morning Guinevere had climb'd
The giant tower, from whose high crest, they say,
Men saw the goodly hills of Somerset,
And white sails flying on the yellow sea;
But not to goodly hill or yellow sea
Look'd the fair Queen, but up the vale of Usk,
By the flat meadow, till she saw them come;
And then descending met them at the gates,
Embraced her with all welcome as a friend,
And did her honour as the Prince's bride,
And clothed her for her bridals like the sun;
And all that week was old Caerleon gay,
For by the hands of Dubric, the high saint,
They twain were wedded with all ceremony.

And this was on the last year's Whitsuntide.
But Enid ever kept the faded silk,
Remembering how first he came on her
Drest in that dress, and how he loved her in it,
And all her foolish fears about the dress,
And all his journey toward her, as himself
Had told her, and their coming to the court.

And now this morning when he said to her,
"Put on your worst and meanest dress," she found
And took it, and array'd herself therein.

Geraint and Enid

Geraint and Enid

O PURBLIND race of miserable men,
How many among us at this very hour
Do forge a lifelong trouble for ourselves,
By taking true for false, or false for true;
Here, thro' the feeble twilight of this world
Groping, how many, until we pass and reach
That other where we see as we are seen!

So fared it with Geraint, who issuing forth
That morning, when they both had got to horse,
Perhaps because he loved her passionately,
And felt that tempest brooding round his heart
Which, if he spoke at all, would break perforce
Upon a head so dear in thunder, said:
" Not at my side. I charge thee ride before,
Ever a good way on before; and this
I charge thee, on thy duty as a wife,
Whatever happens, not to speak to me,
No, not a word!" and Enid was aghast;

And forth they rode, but scarce three paces on,
When crying out, " Effeminate as I am,
I will not fight my way with gilded arms,
All shall be iron; " he loosed a mighty purse,
Hung at his belt, and hurl'd it toward the squire.
So the last sight that Enid had of home
Was all the marble threshold flashing, strown
With gold and scatter'd coinage, and the squire
Chafing his shoulder. Then he cried again,
" To the wilds! " and Enid leading down the tracks
Thro' which he bade her lead him on, they past
The marches, and by bandit-haunted holds,
Grey swamps and pools, waste places of the hern,
And wildernesses, perilous paths, they rode.
Round was their pace at first, but slacken'd soon.
A stranger meeting them had surely thought,
They rode so slowly and they look'd so pale,
That each had suffer'd some exceeding wrong.
For he was ever saying to himself,
" O, I that wasted time to tend upon her,
To compass her with sweet observances,
To dress her beautifully and keep her true "—
And there he broke the sentence in his heart
Abruptly, as a man upon his tongue
May break it when his passion masters him.
And she was ever praying the sweet heavens
To save her dear lord whole from any wound.
And ever in her mind she cast about

For that unnoticed failing in herself
Which made him look so cloudy and so cold;
Till the great plover's human whistle amazed
Her heart, and glancing round the waste she fear'd
In every wavering brake an ambuscade;
Then thought again, " If there be such in me,
I might amend it by the grace of Heaven,
If he would only speak and tell me of it."

But when the fourth part of the day was gone,
Then Enid was aware of three tall knights
On horseback, wholly arm'd, behind a rock
In shadow, waiting for them, caitiffs all;
And heard one crying to his fellow, " Look,
Here comes a laggard hanging down his head,
Who seems no bolder than a beaten hound;
Come, we will slay him and will have his horse
And armour, and his damsel shall be ours."

Then Enid ponder'd in her heart, and said:
" I will go back a little to my lord,
And I will tell him all their caitiff talk;
For, be he wroth even to slaying me,
Far liefer by his dear hand had I die
Than that my lord should suffer loss or shame."

Then she went back some paces of return,
Met his full frown timidly firm, and said:

" My lord, I saw three bandits by the rock
Waiting to fall on you, and heard them boast
That they would slay you, and possess your horse
And armour, and your damsel should be theirs."

He made a wrathful answer: " Did I wish
Your warning or your silence? one command
I laid upon you, not to speak to me,
And thus ye keep it! Well then, look—for now,
Whether ye wish me victory or defeat,
Long for my life or hunger for my death,
Yourself shall see my vigour is not lost."

Then Enid waited pale and sorrowful,
And down upon him bare the bandit three.
And at the midmost charging, Prince Geraint
Drave the long spear a cubit thro' his breast
And out beyond; and then against his brace
Of comrades, each of whom had broken on him
A lance that splinter'd like an icicle,
Swung from his brand a windy buffet out
Once, twice, to right, to left, and stunn'd the twain
Or slew them, and dismounting, like a man
That skins the wild beast after slaying him,
Stript from the three dead wolves of woman born
The three gay suits of armour which they wore,
And let the bodies lie, but bound the suits
Of armour on their horses, each on each,

And tied the bridle-reins of all the three
Together, and said to her, " Drive them on
Before you;" and she drove them thro' the waste.

He follow'd nearer; ruth began to work
Against his anger in him, while he watch'd
The being he loved best in all the world,
With difficulty in mild obedience
Driving them on. He fain had spoken to her,
And loosed in words of sudden fire the wrath
And smoulder'd wrong that burnt him all within;
But evermore it seem'd an easier thing
At once without remorse to strike her dead
Than to cry " Halt," and to her own bright face
Accuse her of the least immodesty:
And thus tongue-tied, it made him wroth the more
That she *could* speak whom his own ear had heard
Call herself false, and suffering thus he made
Minutes an age; but in scarce longer time
Than at Caerleon the full-tided Usk,
Before he turn to fall seaward again,
Pauses, did Enid, keeping watch, behold
In the first shallow shade of a deep wood,
Before a gloom of stubborn-shafted oaks,
Three other horsemen waiting, wholly arm'd,
Whereof one seem'd far larger than her lord,
And shook her pulses, crying, " Look, a prize!
Three horses and three goodly suits of arms,

And all in charge of whom? a girl! set on."
"Nay," said the second, "yonder comes a knight."
The third, "A craven; how he hangs his head!"
The giant answer'd merrily, "Yea, but one?
Wait here, and when he passes fall upon him!"

And Enid ponder'd in her heart and said:
"I will abide the coming of my lord,
And I will tell him all their villainy.
My lord is weary with the fight before,
And they will fall upon him unawares.
I needs must disobey him for his good;
How should I dare obey him to his harm?
Needs must I speak, and tho' he kill me for it,
I save a life dearer to me than mine."

And she abode his coming, and said to him
With timid firmness, "Have I leave to speak?"
He said, "Ye take it, speaking," and she spoke:

"There lurk three villains yonder in the wood,
And each of them is wholly arm'd, and one
Is larger-limb'd than you are, and they say
That they will fall upon you while ye pass."

To which he flung a wrathful answer back:
"And if there were an hundred in the wood,
And every man were larger-limb'd than I,

And all at once should sally out upon me,
I swear it would not ruffle me so much
As you that not obey me. Stand aside,
And if I fall, cleave to the better man."

And Enid stood aside to wait the event,
Not dare to watch the combat, only breathe
Short fits of prayer, at every stroke a breath.
And he she dreaded most bare down upon him.
Aim'd at the helm, his lance err'd; but Geraint's,
A little in the late encounter strain'd,
Struck thro' the bulky bandit's corselet home,
And then brake short, and down his enemy roll'd,
And there lay still; as he that tells the tale
Saw once a great piece of a promontory,
That had a sapling growing on it, slide
From the long shore-cliff's windy walls to the beach,
And there lie still, and yet the sapling grew;
So lay the man transfixt. His craven pair
Of comrades making slowlier at the prince,
When now they saw their bulwark fallen, stood;
On whom the victor, to confound them more,
Spurr'd with his terrible war-cry; for as one,
That listens near a torrent mountain-brook,
All thro' the crash of the near cataract hears
The drumming thunder of the huger fall
At distance, were the soldiers wont to hear
His voice in battle, and be kindled by it,

And foemen scared, like that false pair who turn'd
Flying, but, overtaken, died the death
Themselves had wrought on many an innocent.

Thereon Geraint, dismounting, pick'd the lance
That pleased him best, and drew from those dead wolves
Their three gay suits of armour, each from each,
And bound them on their horses, each on each,
And tied the bridle-reins of all the three
Together, and said to her, " Drive them on
Before you," and she drove them thro' the wood.

He follow'd nearer still. The pain she had
To keep them in the wild ways of the wood,
Two sets of three laden with jingling arms,
Together, served a little to disedge
The sharpness of that pain about her heart;
And they themselves, like creatures gently born
But into bad hands fall'n, and now so long
By bandits groom'd, prick'd their light ears, and felt
Her low firm voice and tender government.

So thro' the green gloom of the wood they past,
And issuing under open heavens beheld
A little town with towers, upon a rock,
And close beneath, a meadow gemlike chased
In the brown wild, and mowers mowing in it;
And down a rocky pathway from the place

There came a fair-hair'd youth, that in his hand
Bare victual for the mowers; and Geraint
Had ruth again on Enid looking pale.
Then, moving downward to the meadow ground,
He, when the fair-hair'd youth came by him, said,
" Friend, let her eat; the damsel is so faint."
" Yea, willingly," replied the youth; " and thou,
My lord, eat also, tho' the fare is coarse,
And only meet for mowers;" then set down
His basket, and dismounting on the sward
They let the horses graze, and ate themselves.
And Enid took a little delicately,
Less having stomach for it than desire
To close with her lord's pleasure, but Geraint
Ate all the mowers' victual unawares,
And when he found all empty was amazed;
And " Boy," said he, " I have eaten all, but take
A horse and arms for guerdon; choose the best."
He, reddening in extremity of delight,
" My lord, you overpay me fifty-fold."
" Ye will be all the wealthier," cried the Prince.
" I take it as free gift, then," said the boy,
" Not guerdon; for myself can easily,
While your good damsel rests, return and fetch
Fresh victual for these mowers of our Earl;
For these are his, and all the field is his,
And I myself am his; and I will tell him
How great a man thou art. He loves to know

When men of mark are in his territory;
And he will have thee to his palace here,
And serve thee costlier than with mowers' fare."

Then said Geraint: "I wish no better fare;
I never ate with angrier appetite
Than when I left your mowers dinnerless.
And into no Earl's palace will I go.
I know, God knows, too much of palaces!
And if he want me, let him come to me.
But hire us some fair chamber for the night,
And stalling for the horses, and return
With victual for these men, and let us know."

"Yea, my kind lord," said the glad youth, and went,
Held his head high, and thought himself a knight,
And up the rocky pathway disappear'd,
Leading the horse, and they were left alone.

But when the Prince had brought his errant eyes
Home from the rock, sideways he let them glance
At Enid where she droopt. His own false doom,
That shadow of mistrust should never cross
Betwixt them, came upon him, and he sigh'd;
Then with another humorous ruth remark'd
The lusty mowers labouring dinnerless,
And watch'd the sun blaze on the turning scythe,
And after nodded sleepily in the heat.

But she, remembering her old ruin'd hall,
And all the windy clamour of the daws
About her hollow turret, pluck'd the grass
There growing longest by the meadow's edge,
And into many a listless annulet,
Now over, now beneath her marriage ring,
Wove and unwove it, till the boy return'd
And told them of a chamber, and they went;
Where, after saying to her, "If ye will,
Call for the woman of the house," to which
She answer'd, "Thanks, my lord;" the two remain'd
Apart by all the chamber's width, and mute
As creatures voiceless thro' the fault of birth,
Or two wild men supporters of a shield,
Painted, who stare at open space, nor glance
The one at other, parted by the shield.

On a sudden, many a voice along the street,
And heel against the pavement echoing, burst
Their drowse; and either started while the door,
Push'd from without, drave backward to the wall,
And midmost of a rout of roisterers,
Femininely fair and dissolutely pale,
Her suitor in old years before Geraint,
Enter'd, the wild lord of the place, Limours.
He moving up with pliant courtliness
Greeted Geraint full face, but stealthily,
In the mid-warmth of welcome and graspt hand,

Found Enid with the corner of his eye,
And knew her sitting sad and solitary.
Then cried Geraint for wine and goodly cheer
To feed the sudden guest, and sumptuously,
According to his fashion, bade the host
Call in what men soever were his friends,
And feast with these in honour of their Earl;
" And care not for the cost; the cost is mine."

And wine and food were brought, and Earl Limours
Drank till he jested with all ease, and told
Free tales, and took the word and play'd upon it,
And made it of two colours; for his talk,
When wine and free companions kindled him,
Was wont to glance and sparkle like a gem
Of fifty facets; thus he moved the Prince
To laughter and his comrades to applause.
Then, when the Prince was merry, ask'd Limours,
" Your leave, my lord, to cross the room, and speak
To your good damsel there who sits apart,
And seems so lonely?" " My free leave," he said;
" Get her to speak; she doth not speak to me."
Then rose Limours, and looking at his feet,
Like him who tries the bridge he fears may fail,
Crost and came near, lifted adoring eyes,
Bow'd at her side and utter'd whisperingly:

" Enid, the pilot star of my lone life,

Enid, my early and my only love,
Enid, the loss of whom hath turn'd me wild—
What chance is this? how is it I see you here?
Ye are in my power at last, are in my power.
Yet fear me not; I call mine own self wild,
But keep a touch of sweet civility
Here in the heart of waste and wilderness.
I thought, but that your father came between,
In former days you saw me favourably.
And if it were so do not keep it back.
Make me a little happier; let me know it.
Owe you me nothing for a life half-lost?
Yea, yea, the whole dear debt of all you are.
And, Enid, you and he, I see with joy,
Ye sit apart, you do not speak to him,
You come with no attendance, page or maid,
To serve you—doth he love you as of old?
For, call it lovers' quarrels, yet I know
Tho' men may bicker with the things they love,
They would not make them laughable in all eyes,
Not while they loved them; and your wretched dress,
A wretched insult on you, dumbly speaks
Your story, that this man loves you no more.
Your beauty is no beauty to him now.
A common chance—right well I know it—pall'd—
For I know men; nor will ye win him back,
For the man's love once gone never returns.
But here is one who loves you as of old;

With more exceeding passion than of old.
Good, speak the word; my followers ring him round.
He sits unarm'd; I hold a finger up;
They understand. Nay, I do not mean blood;
Nor need ye look so scared at what I say.
My malice is no deeper than a moat,
No stronger than a wall. There is the keep;
He shall not cross us more; speak but the word.
Or speak it not; but then by Him that made me
The one true lover whom you ever own'd,
I will make use of all the power I have.
O pardon me! the madness of that hour
When first I parted from thee moves me yet."

At this the tender sound of his own voice
And sweet self-pity, or the fancy of it,
Made his eye moist; but Enid fear'd his eyes,
Moist as they were, wine-heated from the feast,
And answer'd with such craft as women use,
Guilty or guiltless, to stave off a chance
That breaks upon them perilously, and said:

"Earl, if you love me as in former years,
And do not practise on me, come with morn,
And snatch me from him as by violence.
Leave me to-night; I am weary to the death."

Low at leave-taking, with his brandish'd plume

Brushing his instep, bow'd the all-amorous Earl,
And the stout Prince bade him a loud good-night.
He moving homeward babbled to his men,
How Enid never loved a man but him,
Nor cared a broken egg-shell for her lord.

But Enid left alone with Prince Geraint,
Debating his command of silence given,
And that she now perforce must violate it,
Held commune with herself, and while she held
He fell asleep, and Enid had no heart
To wake him, but hung o'er him, wholly pleased
To find him yet unwounded after fight,
And hear him breathing low and equally.
Anon she rose and, stepping lightly, heap'd
The pieces of his armour in one place,
All to be there against a sudden need;
Then dozed awhile herself, but, overtoil'd
By that day's grief and travel, evermore
Seem'd catching at a rootless thorn, and then
Went slipping down horrible precipices,
And strongly striking out her limbs awoke;
Then thought she heard the wild Earl at the door,
With all his rout of random followers,
Sound on a dreadful trumpet, summoning her;
Which was the red cock shouting to the light,
As the grey dawn stole o'er the dewy world
And glimmer'd on his armour in the room.

And once again she rose to look at it,
But touch'd it unawares; jangling, the casque
Fell, and he started up and stared at her.
Then breaking his command of silence given,
She told him all that Earl Limours had said,
Except the passage that he loved her not;
Nor left untold the craft herself had used,
But ended with apology so sweet,
Low-spoken, and of so few words, and seem'd
So justified by that necessity,
That tho' he thought, "Was it for him she wept
In Devon?" he but gave a wrathful groan,
Saying, "Your sweet faces make good fellows fools
And traitors. Call the host and bid him bring
Charger and palfrey." So she glided out
Among the heavy breathings of the house,
And like a household spirit at the walls
Beat, till she woke the sleepers, and return'd;
Then tending her rough lord, tho' all unask'd,
In silence, did him service as a squire;
Till issuing arm'd he found the host and cried,
"Thy reckoning, friend?" and ere he learnt it, "Take
Five horses and their armours;" and the host,
Suddenly honest, answer'd in amaze,
"My lord, I scarce have spent the worth of one!"
"Ye will be all the wealthier," said the Prince,
And then to Enid, "Forward! and to-day
I charge you, Enid, more especially,

What thing soever ye may hear, or see,
Or fancy—tho' I count it of small use
To charge you—that ye speak not but obey."

And Enid answer'd: " Yea, my lord, I know
Your wish and would obey; but, riding first,
I hear the violent threats you do not hear,
I see the danger which you cannot see.
Then not to give you warning, that seems hard,
Almost beyond me; yet I would obey."

" Yea so," said he, " do it; be not too wise,
Seeing that ye are wedded to a man,
Not all mismated with a yawning clown,
But one with arms to guard his head and yours,
With eyes to find you out however far,
And ears to hear you even in his dreams."

With that he turn'd and look'd as keenly at her
As careful robins eye the delver's toil;
And that within her which a wanton fool
Or hasty judger would have call'd her guilt
Made her cheek burn and either eyelid fall.
And Geraint look'd and was not satisfied.

Then forward by a way which, beaten broad,
Led from the territory of false Limours
To the waste earldom of another earl,
Doorm, whom his shaking vassals call'd the Bull,
Went Enid with her sullen follower on.

Once she look'd back, and when she saw him ride
More near by many a rood than yester-morn,
It wellnigh made her cheerful; till Geraint,
Waving an angry hand as who should say,
"Ye watch me," sadden'd all her heart again.
But while the sun yet beat a dewy blade,
The sound of many a heavily-galloping hoof
Smote on her ear, and turning round she saw
Dust, and the points of lances bicker in it.
Then, not to disobey her lord's behest,
And yet to give him warning, for he rode
As if he heard not, moving back she held
Her finger up, and pointed to the dust.
At which the warrior in his obstinacy,
Because she kept the letter of his word,
Was in a manner pleased, and turning stood.
And in the moment after, wild Limours,
Borne on a black horse, like a thunder-cloud
Whose skirts are loosen'd by the breaking storm,
Half ridden off with by the thing he rode,
And all in passion uttering a dry shriek,
Dash'd on Geraint, who closed with him, and bore
Down by the length of lance and arm beyond
The crupper, and so left him stunn'd or dead,
And overthrew the next that follow'd him,
And blindly rush'd on all the rout behind.
But at the flash and motion of the man
They vanish'd panic-stricken, like a shoal

Of darting fish, that on a summer morn
Adown the crystal dykes at Camelot
Come slipping o'er their shadows on the sand,
But if a man who stands upon the brink
But lift a shining hand against the sun,
There is not left the twinkle of a fin
Betwixt the cressy islets white in flower;
So, scared but at the motion of the man,
Fled all the boon companions of the Earl,
And left him lying in the public way;
So vanish friendships only made in wine.

Then like a stormy sunlight smiled Geraint,
Who saw the chargers of the two that fell
Start from their fallen lords and wildly fly,
Mixt with the flyers. "Horse and man," he said,
"All of one mind and all right-honest friends!
Not a hoof left! and I methinks till now
Was honest—paid with horses and with arms;
I cannot steal or plunder, no, nor beg.
And so what say ye, shall we strip him there,
Your lover? has your palfrey heart enough
To bear his armour? shall we fast or dine?
No?—then do thou, being right honest, pray
That we may meet the horsemen of Earl Doorm;
I too would still be honest." Thus he said;
And sadly gazing on her bridle-reins,
And answering not one word, she led the way.

But as a man to whom a dreadful loss
Falls in a far land and he knows it not,
But coming back he learns it, and the loss
So pains him that he sickens nigh to death;
So fared it with Geraint, who, being prick'd
In combat with the follower of Limours,
Bled underneath his armour secretly,
And so rode on, nor told his gentle wife
What ail'd him, hardly knowing it himself,
Till his eye darken'd and his helmet wagg'd;
And at a sudden swerving of the road,
Tho' happily down on a bank of grass,
The Prince, without a word, from his horse fell.

And Enid heard the clashing of his fall,
Suddenly came, and at his side all pale
Dismounting loosed the fastenings of his arms,
Nor let her true hand falter, nor blue eye
Moisten, till she had lighted on his wound,
And tearing off her veil of faded silk
Had bared her forehead to the blistering sun,
And swathed the hurt that drain'd her dear lord's life.
Then, after all was done that hand could do,
She rested, and her desolation came
Upon her, and she wept beside the way.

And many past, but none regarded her,
For in that realm of lawless turbulence

A woman weeping for her murder'd mate
Was cared as much for as a summer shower.
One took him for a victim of Earl Doorm,
Nor dared to waste a perilous pity on him.
Another hurrying past, a man-at-arms,
Rode on a mission to the bandit Earl;
Half whistling and half singing a coarse song,
He drove the dust against her veilless eyes.
Another, flying from the wrath of Doorm
Before an ever-fancied arrow, made
The long way smoke beneath him in his fear;
At which her palfrey whinnying lifted heel,
And scour'd into the coppices and was lost,
While the great charger stood, grieved like a man.

But at the point of noon the huge Earl Doorm,
Broad-faced with under-fringe of russet beard,
Bound on a foray, rolling eyes of prey,
Came riding with a hundred lances up;
But ere he came, like one that hails a ship,
Cried out with a big voice, "What, is he dead?"
"No, no, not dead!" she answer'd in all haste.
"Would some of your kind people take him up,
And bear him hence out of this cruel sun?
Most sure am I, quite sure, he is not dead."

Then said Earl Doorm: "Well, if he be not dead,
Why wail ye for him thus? ye seem a child.

And be he dead, I count you for a fool;
Your wailing will not quicken him; dead or not,
Ye mar a comely face with idiot tears.
Yet, since the face *is* comely—some of you,
Here, take him up, and bear him to our hall.
An if he live, we will have him of our band;
And if he die, why earth has earth enough
To hide him. See ye take the charger too,
A noble one."

He spake and past away,
But left two brawny spearmen, who advanced,
Each growling like a dog, when his good bone
Seems to be pluck'd at by the village boys
Who love to vex him eating, and he fears
To lose his bone, and lays his foot upon it,
Gnawing and growling; so the ruffians growl'd,
Fearing to lose, and all for a dead man,
Their chance of booty from the morning's raid,
Yet raised and laid him on a litter-bier,
Such as they brought upon their forays out
For those that might be wounded; laid him on it
All in the hollow of his shield, and took
And bore him to the naked hall of Doorm—
His gentle charger following him unled—
And cast him and the bier in which he lay
Down on an oaken settle in the hall,
And then departed, hot in haste to join

Their luckier mates, but growling as before,
And cursing their lost time, and the dead man,
And their own Earl, and their own souls, and her.
They might as well have blest her; she was deaf
To blessing or to cursing save from one.

So for long hours sat Enid by her lord
There in the naked hall, propping his head,
And chafing his pale hands, and calling to him,
Till at the last he waken'd from his swoon,
And found his own dear bride propping his head,
And chafing his faint hands, and calling to him;
And felt the warm tears falling on his face,
And said to his own heart, " She weeps for me;"
And yet lay still, and feign'd himself as dead,
That he might prove her to the uttermost,
And say to his own heart, " She weeps for me."

But in the falling afternoon return'd
The huge Earl Doorm with plunder to the hall.
His lusty spearmen follow'd him with noise:
Each hurling down a heap of things that rang
Against the pavement, cast his lance aside,
And doff'd his helm; and then there flutter'd in,
Half-bold, half-frighted, with dilated eyes,
A tribe of women, dress'd in many hues,
And mingled with the spearmen; and Earl Doorm
Struck with a knife's haft hard against the board,
And call'd for flesh and wine to feed his spears.

And men brought in whole hogs and quarter beeves,
And all the hall was dim with steam of flesh.
And none spake word, but all sat down at once,
And ate with tumult in the naked hall,
Feeding like horses when you hear them feed;
Till Enid shrank far back into herself,
To shun the wild ways of the lawless tribe.
But when Earl Doorm had eaten all he would,
He roll'd his eyes about the hall, and found
A damsel drooping in a corner of it.
Then he remember'd her and how she wept,
And out of her there came a power upon him;
And rising on the sudden he said: "Eat!
I never yet beheld a thing so pale.
God's curse, it makes me mad to see you weep.
Eat! Look yourself. Good luck had your good man,
For were I dead who is it would weep for me?
Sweet lady, never since I first drew breath
Have I beheld a lily like yourself.
And so there lived some colour in your cheek,
There is not one among my gentlewomen
Were fit to wear your slipper for a glove.
But listen to me, and by me be ruled,
And I will do the thing I have not done,
For ye shall share my earldom with me, girl,
And we will live like two birds in one nest,
And I will fetch you forage from all fields,
For I compel all creatures to my will."

He spoke; the brawny spearman let his cheek
Bulge with the unswallow'd piece, and turning stared;
While some, whose souls the old serpent long had drawn
Down, as the worm draws in the wither'd leaf
And makes it earth, hiss'd each at other's ear
What shall not be recorded—women they,
Women, or what had been those gracious things,
But now desired the humbling of their best,
Yea, would have help'd him to it; and all at once
They hated her, who took no thought of them,
But answer'd in low voice, her meek head yet
Drooping, " I pray you of your courtesy,
He being as he is, to let me be."

She spake so low he hardly heard her speak,
But like a mighty patron, satisfied
With what himself had done so graciously,
Assumed that she had thank'd him, adding, " Yea,
Eat and be glad, for I account you mine."

She answer'd meekly, " How should I be glad
Henceforth in all the world at anything,
Until my lord arise and look upon me?"

Here the huge Earl cried out upon her talk,
As all but empty heart and weariness
And sickly nothing; suddenly seized on her,
And bare her by main violence to the board,
And thrust the dish before her, crying, " Eat."

"No, no," said Enid, vext, "I will not eat
Till yonder man upon the bier arise,
And eat with me." "Drink, then," he answer'd.
"Here!"—
And fill'd a horn with wine and held it to her,—
"Lo! I, myself, when flush'd with fight or hot,
God's curse, with anger—often I myself,
Before I well have drunken, scarce can eat;
Drink therefore, and the wine will change your will."

"Not so," she cried, "by Heaven, I will not drink
Till my dear lord arise and bid me do it,
And drink with me; and if he rise no more,
I will not look at wine until I die."

At this he turn'd all red and paced his hall,
Now gnaw'd his under, now his upper lip,
And coming up close to her, said at last:
"Girl, for I see ye scorn my courtesies,
Take warning; yonder man is surely dead,
And I compel all creatures to my will.
Not eat nor drink? And wherefore wail for one
Who put your beauty to this flout and scorn
By dressing it in rags? Amazed am I,
Beholding how ye butt against my wish,
That I forbear you thus; cross me no more.
At least put off to please me this poor gown,
This silken rag, this beggar-woman's weed.

I love that beauty should go beautifully;
For see ye not my gentlewomen here,
How gay, how suited to the house of one
Who loves that beauty should go beautifully?
Rise therefore; robe yourself in this; obey."

He spoke, and one among his gentlewomen
Display'd a splendid silk of foreign loom,
Where like a shoaling sea the lovely blue
Play'd into green, and thicker down the front
With jewels than the sward with drops of dew,
When all night long a cloud clings to the hill,
And with the dawn ascending lets the day
Strike where it clung; so thickly shone the gems.

But Enid answer'd, harder to be moved
Than hardest tyrants in their day of power,
With lifelong injuries burning unavenged,
And now their hour has come; and Enid said:

"In this poor gown my dear lord found me first,
And loved me serving in my father's hall;
In this poor gown I rode with him to court,
And there the Queen array'd me like the sun;
In this poor gown he bade me clothe myself,
When now we rode upon this fatal quest
Of honour, where no honour can be gain'd;
And this poor gown I will not cast aside

Until himself arise a living man,
And bid me cast it. I have griefs enough;
Pray you be gentle, pray you let me be.
I never loved, can never love but him.
Yea, God, I pray you of your gentleness,
He being as he is, to let me be."

Then strode the brute Earl up and down his hall,
And took his russet beard between his teeth;
Last, coming up quite close, and in his mood
Crying, " I count it of no more avail,
Dame, to be gentle than ungentle with you;
Take my salute," unknightly with flat hand,
However lightly, smote her on the cheek.

Then Enid, in her utter helplessness,
And since she thought, " He had not dared to do it,
Except he surely knew my lord was dead,"
Sent forth a sudden sharp and bitter cry,
As of a wild thing taken in the trap,
Which sees the trapper coming thro' the wood.

This heard Geraint, and grasping at his sword,—
It lay beside him in the hollow shield,—
Made but a single bound, and with a sweep of it
Shore thro' the swarthy neck, and like a ball
The russet-bearded head roll'd on the floor.
So died Earl Doorm by him he counted dead.

And all the men and women in the hall
Rose when they saw the dead man rise, and fled
Yelling as from a spectre, and the two
Were left alone together, and he said:

"Enid, I have used you worse than that dead man;
Done you more wrong; we both have undergone
That trouble which has left me thrice your own.
Henceforward I will rather die than doubt.
And here I lay this penance on myself,
Not, tho' mine own ears heard you yester-morn—
You thought me sleeping, but I heard you say,
I heard you say, that you were no true wife,
I swear I will not ask your meaning in it.
I do believe yourself against yourself,
And will henceforward rather die than doubt."

And Enid could not say one tender word,
She felt so blunt and stupid at the heart.
She only pray'd him, "Fly, they will return
And slay you; fly, your charger is without,
My palfrey lost." "Then, Enid, shall you ride
Behind me." "Yea," said Enid, "let us go."
And moving out they found the stately horse,
Who now no more a vassal to the thief,
But free to stretch his limbs in lawful fight,
Neigh'd with all gladness as they came, and stoop'd
With a low whinny toward the pair; and she

Kiss'd the white star upon his noble front,
Glad also; then Geraint upon the horse
Mounted, and reach'd a hand, and on his foot
She set her own and climb'd; he turn'd his face
And kiss'd her climbing, and she cast her arms
About him, and at once they rode away.

And never yet, since high in Paradise
O'er the four rivers the first roses blew,
Came purer pleasure unto mortal kind
Than lived thro' her who in that perilous hour
Put hand to hand beneath her husband's heart,
And felt him hers again. She did not weep,
But o'er her meek eyes came a happy mist
Like that which kept the heart of Eden green
Before the useful trouble of the rain.
Yet not so misty were her meek blue eyes
As not to see before them on the path,
Right in the gateway of the bandit hold,
A knight of Arthur's court, who laid his lance
In rest and made as if to fall upon him.
Then, fearing for his hurt and loss of blood,
She, with her mind all full of what had chanced,
Shriek'd to the stranger, "Slay not a dead man!"
"The voice of Enid," said the knight; but she,
Beholding it was Edyrn, son of Nudd,
Was moved so much the more, and shriek'd again,
"O cousin, slay not him who gave you life."

And Edyrn moving frankly forward spake:
"My lord Geraint, I greet you with all love;
I took you for a bandit knight of Doorm;
And fear not, Enid, I should fall upon him,
Who love you, Prince, with something of the love
Wherewith we love the Heaven that chastens us.
For once, when I was up so high in pride
That I was half-way down the slope to hell,
By overthrowing me you threw me higher.
Now, made a knight of Arthur's Table Round,
And since I knew this earl when I myself
Was half a bandit in my lawless hour,
I came the mouthpiece of our King to Doorm—
The King is close behind me—bidding him
Disband himself, and scatter all his powers,
Submit, and hear the judgment of the King."

"He hears the judgment of the King of kings,"
Cried the wan Prince; "and lo, the powers of Doorm
Are scatter'd!" and he pointed to the field,
Where, huddled here and there on mound and knoll,
Were men and women staring and aghast,
While some yet fled; and then he plainlier told
How the huge Earl lay slain within his hall.
But when the knight besought him, "Follow me,
Prince, to the camp, and in the King's own ear
Speak what has chanced; ye surely have endured
Strange chances here alone;" that other flush'd,

And hung his head, and halted in reply,
Fearing the mild face of the blameless King,
And after madness acted question ask'd;
Till Edyrn crying, " If ye will not go
To Arthur, then will Arthur come to you,"
" Enough," he said, " I follow," and they went.
But Enid in their going had two fears,
One from the bandit scatter'd in the field,
And one from Edyrn. Every now and then,
When Edyrn rein'd his charger at her side,
She shrank a little. In a hollow land,
From which old fires have broken, men may fear
Fresh fire and ruin. He, perceiving, said:

" Fair and dear cousin, you that most had cause
To fear me, fear no longer, I am changed.
Yourself were first the blameless cause to make
My nature's prideful sparkle in the blood
Break into furious flame; being repulsed
By Yniol and yourself, I schemed and wrought
Until I overturn'd him; then set up—
With one main purpose ever at my heart—
My haughty jousts, and took a paramour;
Did her mock-honour as the fairest fair,
And, toppling over all antagonism,
So wax'd in pride that I believed myself
Unconquerable, for I was wellnigh mad;
And, but for my main purpose in these jousts,

I should have slain your father, seized yourself.
I lived in hope that sometime you would come
To these my lists with him whom best you loved,
And there, poor cousin, with your meek blue eyes,
The truest eyes that ever answer'd Heaven,
Behold me overturn and trample on him.
Then, had you cried, or knelt, or pray'd to me,
I should not less have kill'd him. And you came,—
But once you came,—and with your own true eyes
Beheld the man you loved—I speak as one
Speaks of a service done him—overthrow
My proud self, and my purpose three years old,
And set his foot upon me, and give me life.
There was I broken down, there was I saved;
Tho' thence I rode all-shamed, hating the life
He gave me, meaning to be rid of it.
And all the penance the Queen laid upon me
Was but to rest awhile within her court;
Where first as sullen as a beast new-caged,
And waiting to be treated like a wolf,
Because I knew my deeds were known, I found,
Instead of scornful pity or pure scorn,
Such fine reserve and noble reticence,
Manners so kind, yet stately, such a grace
Of tenderest courtesy, that I began
To glance behind me at my former life,
And find that it had been the wolf's indeed.
And oft I talk'd with Dubric, the high saint,

Who, with mild heat of holy oratory,
Subdued me somewhat to that gentleness
Which, when it weds with manhood, makes a man.
And you were often there about the Queen,
But saw me not, or mark'd not if you saw;
Nor did I care or dare to speak with you,
But kept myself aloof till I was changed;
And fear not, cousin, I am changed indeed."

He spoke, and Enid easily believed,
Like simple noble natures, credulous
Of what they long for, good in friend or foe,
There most in those who most have done them ill.
And when they reach'd the camp the King himself
Advanced to greet them, and beholding her
Tho' pale, yet happy, ask'd her not a word,
But went apart with Edyrn, whom he held
In converse for a little, and return'd,
And, gravely smiling, lifted her from horse,
And kiss'd her with all pureness, brotherlike,
And show'd an empty tent allotted her,
And glancing for a minute, till he saw her
Pass into it, turn'd to the Prince, and said:

"Prince, when of late ye pray'd me for my leave
To move to your own land and there defend
Your marches, I was prick'd with some reproof,
As one that let foul wrong stagnate and be,

By having look'd too much thro' alien eyes,
And wrought too long with delegated hands,
Not used mine own; but now behold me come
To cleanse this common sewer of all my realm,
With Edyrn and with others. Have ye look'd
At Edyrn? have ye seen how nobly changed?
This work of his is great and wonderful.
His very face with change of heart is changed.
The world will not believe a man repents;
And this wise world of ours is mainly right.
Full seldom doth a man repent, or use
Both grace and will to pick the vicious quitch
Of blood and custom wholly out of him,
And make all clean, and plant himself afresh.
Edyrn has done it, weeding all his heart
As I will weed this land before I go.
I, therefore, made him of our Table Round,
Not rashly, but have proved him every way
One of our noblest, our most valorous,
Sanest and most obedient; and indeed
This work of Edyrn, wrought upon himself
After a life of violence, seems to me
A thousand-fold more great and wonderful
Than if some knight of mine, risking his life,
My subject with my subjects under him,
Should make an onslaught single on a realm
Of robbers, tho' he slew them one by one,
And were himself nigh wounded to the death."

So spake the King; low bow'd the Prince, and felt
His work was neither great nor wonderful,
And past to Enid's tent; and thither came
The King's own leech to look into his hurt;
And Enid tended on him there; and there
Her constant motion round him, and the breath
Of her sweet tendance hovering over him,
Fill'd all the genial courses of his blood
With deeper and with ever deeper love,
As the Southwest that blowing Bala lake
Fills all the sacred Dee. So past the days.

But while Geraint lay healing of his hurt,
The blameless King went forth and cast his eyes
On each of all whom Uther left in charge
Long since, to guard the justice of the King.
He look'd and found them wanting; and as now
Men weed the White Horse on the Berkshire hills,
To keep him bright and clean as heretofore,
He rooted out the slothful officer
Or guilty, which for bribe had wink'd at wrong,
And in their chairs set up a stronger race
With hearts and hands, and sent a thousand men
To till the wastes, and moving everywhere
Clear'd the dark places and let in the law,
And broke the bandit holds and cleansed the land.

Then, when Geraint was whole again, they past

With Arthur to Caerleon upon Usk.
There the great Queen once more embraced her friend,
And clothed her in apparel like the day.
And tho' Geraint could never take again
That comfort from their converse which he took
Before the Queen's fair name was breathed upon,
He rested well content that all was well.
Thence after tarrying for a space they rode,
And fifty knights rode with them to the shores
Of Severn, and they past to their own land.
And there he kept the justice of the King
So vigorously yet mildly that all hearts
Applauded, and the spiteful whisper died;
And being ever foremost in the chase,
And victor at the tilt and tournament,
They call'd him the great Prince and man of men.
But Enid, whom her ladies loved to call
Enid the Fair, a grateful people named
Enid the Good; and in their halls arose
The cry of children, Enids and Geraints
Of times to be; nor did he doubt her more,
But rested in her fealty till he crown'd
A happy life with a fair death, and fell
Against the heathen of the Northern Sea
In battle, fighting for the blameless King.

Balin and Balan

Balin and Balan

PELLAM the king, who held and lost with Lot
In that first war, and had his realm restored
But render'd tributary, fail'd of late
To send his tribute; wherefore Arthur call'd
His treasurer, one of many years, and spake:
" Go thou with him and him and bring it to us,
Lest we should set one truer on his throne.
Man's word is God in man."

His baron said:
" We go, but harken; there be two strange knights
Who sit near Camelot at a fountain-side
A mile beneath the forest, challenging
And overthrowing every knight who comes.
Wilt thou I undertake them as we pass,
And send them to thee?"

Arthur laugh'd upon him:
" Old friend, too old to be so young, depart,

Delay not thou for aught, but let them sit,
Until they find a lustier than themselves."

So these departed. Early, one fair dawn,
The light-wing'd spirit of his youth return'd
On Arthur's heart; he arm'd himself and went,
So coming to the fountain-side beheld
Balin and Balan sitting statue-like,
Brethren, to right and left the spring, that down,
From underneath a plume of lady-fern,
Sang, and the sand danced at the bottom of it.
And on the right of Balin Balin's horse
Was fast beside an alder, on the left
Of Balan Balan's near a poplar-tree.
"Fair sirs," said Arthur, "wherefore sit ye here?"
Balin and Balan answer'd: "For the sake
Of glory; we be mightier men than all
In Arthur's court; that also have we proved,
For whatsoever knight against us came
Or I or he have easily overthrown."
"I too," said Arthur, "am of Arthur's hall,
But rather proven in his Paynim wars
Than famous jousts; but see, or proven or not,
Whether me likewise ye can overthrow."
And Arthur lightly smote the brethren down,
And lightly so return'd, and no man knew.

Then Balin rose, and Balan, and beside
The carolling water set themselves again,

And spake no word until the shadow turn'd;
When from the fringe of coppice round them burst
A spangled pursuivant, and crying, " Sirs,
Rise, follow! ye be sent for by the King,"
They follow'd; whom when Arthur seeing ask'd,
" Tell me your names; why sat ye by the well? "
Balin the stillness of a minute broke
Saying, " An unmelodious name to thee,
Balin, 'the Savage'—that addition thine—
My brother and my better, this man here,
Balan. I smote upon the naked skull
A thrall of thine in open hall; my hand
Was gauntleted, half slew him, for I heard
He had spoken evil of me; thy just wrath
Sent me a three-years' exile from thine eyes.
I have not lived my life delightsomely;
For I that did that violence to thy thrall
Had often wrought some fury on myself,
Saving for Balan. Those three kingless years
Have past—were wormwood-bitter to me. King,
Methought that if we sat beside the well,
And hurl'd to ground what knight soever spurr'd
Against us, thou would'st take me gladlier back,
And make, as ten times worthier to be thine
Than twenty Balins, Balan knight. I have said.
Not so—not all. A man of thine to-day
Abash'd us both, and brake my boast. Thy will? "
Said Arthur: " Thou hast ever spoken truth;

Thy too fierce manhood would not let thee lie.
Rise, my true knight. As children learn, be thou
Wiser for falling! walk with me, and move
To music with thine Order and the King.
Thy chair, a grief to all the brethren, stands
Vacant, but thou retake it, mine again!"

Thereafter, when Sir Balin enter'd hall,
The lost one found was greeted as in heaven
With joy that blazed itself in woodland wealth
Of leaf, and gayest garlandage of flowers,
Along the walls and down the board; they sat,
And cup clash'd cup; they drank, and some one sang
Sweet-voiced, a song of welcome, whereupon
Their common shout in chorus, mounting, made
Those banners of twelve battles overhead
Stir as they stirr'd of old, when Arthur's host
Proclaim'd him victor and the day was won.

Then Balan added to their Order lived
A wealthier life than heretofore with these
And Balin, till their embassage return'd.

"Sir King," they brought report, "we hardly found,
So bush'd about it is with gloom, the hall
Of him to whom ye sent us, Pellam, once
A Christless foe of thine as ever dash'd
Horse against horse; but seeing that thy realm

Hath prosper'd in the name of Christ, the King
Took, as in rival heat, to holy things,
And finds himself descended from the Saint
Arimathæan Joseph, him who first
Brought the great faith to Britain over seas.
He boasts his life as purer than thine own;
Eats scarce enow to keep his pulse a-beat;
Hath push'd aside his faithful wife, nor lets
Or dame or damsel enter at his gates
Lest he should be polluted. This grey king
Show'd us a shrine wherein were wonders—yea,
Rich arks with priceless bones of martyrdom,
Thorns of the crown and shivers of the cross,
And therewithal,—for thus he told us,—brought
By holy Joseph hither, that same spear
Wherewith the Roman pierced the side of Christ.
He much amazed us; after, when we sought
The tribute, answer'd, " I have quite foregone
All matters of this world. Garlon, mine heir,
Of him demand it," which this Garlon gave
With much ado, railing at thine and thee.

" But when we left, in those deep woods we found
A knight of thine spear-stricken from behind,
Dead, whom we buried; more than one of us
Cried out on Garlon, but a woodman there
Reported of some demon in the woods
Was once a man, who, driven by evil tongues

From all his fellows, lived alone, and came
To learn black magic, and to hate his kind
With such a hate that when he died his soul
Became a fiend, which, as the man in life
Was wounded by blind tongues he saw not whence,
Strikes from behind. This woodman show'd the cave
From which he sallies and wherein he dwelt.
We saw the hoof-print of a horse, no more."

Then Arthur, "Let who goes before me see
He do not fall behind me. Foully slain
And villainously! who will hunt for me
This demon of the woods?" Said Balan, "I!"
So claim'd the quest and rode away, but first,
Embracing Balin: "Good my brother, hear!
Let not thy moods prevail when I am gone
Who used to lay them! hold them outer fiends,
Who leap at thee to tear thee; shake them aside,
Dreams ruling when wit sleeps! yea, but to dream
That any of these would wrong thee wrongs thyself.
Witness their flowery welcome. Bound are they
To speak no evil. Truly, save for fears,
My fears for thee, so rich a fellowship
Would make me wholly blest; thou one of them,
Be one indeed. Consider them, and all
Their bearing in their common bond of love,
No more of hatred than in heaven itself,
No more of jealousy than in Paradise."

So Balan warn'd, and went; Balin remain'd,
Who—for but three brief moons had glanced away
From being knighted till he smote the thrall,
And faded from the presence into years
Of exile—now would strictlier set himself
To learn what Arthur meant by courtesy,
Manhood, and knighthood; wherefore hover'd round
Lancelot, but when he mark'd his high sweet smile
In passing, and a transitory word
Make knight or churl or child or damsel seem
From being smiled at happier in themselves—
Sigh'd, as a boy, lame-born beneath a height
That glooms his valley, sighs to see the peak
Sun-flush'd or touch at night the northern star;
For one from out his village lately climb'd
And brought report of azure lands and fair,
Far seen to left and right; and he himself
Hath hardly scaled with help a hundred feet
Up from the base. So Balin, marvelling oft
How far beyond him Lancelot seem'd to move,
Groan'd, and at times would mutter: "These be gifts,
Born with the blood, not learnable, divine,
Beyond *my* reach. Well had I foughten—well—
In those fierce wars, struck hard—and had I crown'd
With my slain self the heaps of whom I slew—
So—better!—But this worship of the Queen,
That honour too wherein she holds him—this,
This was the sunshine that hath given the man

A growth, a name that branches o'er the rest,
And strength against all odds, and what the King
So prizes—overprizes—gentleness.
Her likewise would I worship an I might.
I never can be close with her, as he
That brought her hither. Shall I pray the King
To let me bear some token of his Queen
Whereon to gaze, remembering her—forget
My heats and violences? live afresh?
What if the Queen disdain'd to grant it! nay,
Being so stately-gentle, would she make
My darkness blackness? and with how sweet grace
She greeted my return! Bold will I be—
Some goodly cognizance of Guinevere,
In lieu of this rough beast upon my shield,
Langued gules, and tooth'd with grinning savagery."

And Arthur, when Sir Balin sought him, said,
"What wilt thou bear?" Balin was bold, and ask'd
To bear her own crown-royal upon shield,
Whereat she smiled and turn'd her to the King,
Who answer'd: "Thou shalt put the crown to use.
The crown is but the shadow of the king,
And this a shadow's shadow, let him have it,
So this will help him of his violences!"
"No shadow," said Sir Balin, "O my Queen,
But light to me! no shadow, O my King,
But golden earnest of a gentler life!"

So Balin bare the crown, and all the knights
Approved him, and the Queen; and all the world
Made music, and he felt his being move
In music with his Order and the King.

The nightingale, full-toned in middle May,
Hath ever and anon a note so thin
It seems another voice in other groves;
Thus, after some quick burst of sudden wrath,
The music in him seem'd to change and grow
Faint and far-off.

And once he saw the thrall
His passion half had gauntleted to death,
That causer of his banishment and shame,
Smile at him, as he deem'd, presumptuously.
His arm half rose to strike again, but fell;
The memory of that cognisance on shield
Weighted it down, but in himself he moan'd:

"Too high this mount of Camelot for me;
These high-set courtesies are not for me.
Shall I not rather prove the worse for these?
Fierier and stormier from restraining, break
Into some madness even before the Queen?"

Thus, as a hearth lit in a mountain home,
And glancing on the window, when the gloom

Of twilight deepens round it, seems a flame
That rages in the woodland far below,
So when his moods were darken'd, court and King
And all the kindly warmth of Arthur's hall
Shadow'd an angry distance; yet he strove
To learn the graces of their Table, fought
Hard with himself, and seem'd at length in peace.

Then chanced, one morning, that Sir Balin sat
Close-bower'd in that garden nigh the hall.
A walk of roses ran from door to door,
A walk of lilies crost it to the bower;
And down that range of roses the great Queen
Came with slow steps, the morning on her face;
And all in shadow from the counter door
Sir Lancelot as to meet her, then at once,
As if he saw not, glanced aside, and paced
The long white walk of lilies toward the bower.
Follow'd the Queen; Sir Balin heard her "Prince,
Art thou so little loyal to thy Queen
As pass without good morrow to thy Queen?"
To whom Sir Lancelot with his eyes on earth,
"Fain would I still be loyal to the Queen."
"Yea, so," she said; "but so to pass me by—
So loyal scarce is loyal to thyself,
Whom all men rate the king of courtesy.
Let be; ye stand, fair lord, as in a dream."

Then Lancelot with his hand among the flowers:

" Yea—for a dream. Last night methought I saw
That maiden Saint who stands with lily in hand
In yonder shrine. All round her prest the dark,
And all the light upon her silver face
Flow'd from the spiritual lily that she held.
Lo! these her emblems drew mine eyes—away;
For see, how perfect-pure! As light a flush
As hardly tints the blossom of the quince
Would mar their charm of stainless maidenhood."

" Sweeter to me," she said, " this garden rose
Deep-hued and many-folded! sweeter still
The wild-wood hyacinth and the bloom of May!
Prince, we have ridden before among the flowers
In those fair days—not all as cool as these,
Tho' season-earlier. Art thou sad? or sick?
Our noble King will send thee his own leech—
Sick? or for any matter anger'd at me?"

Then Lancelot lifted his large eyes; they dwelt
Deep-tranced on hers, and could not fall. Her hue
Changed at his gaze; so turning side by side
They past, and Balin started from his bower.

" Queen? subject? but I see not what I see.
Damsel and lover? hear not what I hear.
My father hath begotten me in his wrath.
I suffer from the things before me, know,

Learn nothing; am not worthy to be knight—
A churl, a clown!" and in him gloom on gloom
Deepen'd; he sharply caught his lance and shield,
Nor stay'd to crave permission of the King,
But, mad for strange adventure, dash'd away.

He took the selfsame track as Balan, saw
The fountain where they sat together, sigh'd,
"Was I not better there with him?" and rode
The skyless woods, but under open blue
Came on the hoar-head woodman at a bough
Wearily hewing. "Churl, thine axe!" he cried,
Descended, and disjointed it at a blow;
To whom the woodman utter'd wonderingly,
"Lord, thou couldst lay the devil of these woods
If arm of flesh could lay him!" Balin cried,
"Him, or the viler devil who plays his part;
To lay that devil would lay the devil in me."
"Nay," said the churl, "our devil is a truth,
I saw the flash of him but yester-even.
And some *do* say that our Sir Garlon too
Hath learn'd black magic, and to ride unseen.
Look to the cave." But Balin answer'd him,
"Old fabler, these be fancies of the churl;
Look to thy woodcraft," and so leaving him,
Now with slack rein and careless of himself,
Now with dug spur and raving at himself,
Now with droopt brow down the long glades he rode;

So mark'd not on his right a cavern-chasm
Yawn over darkness, where, nor far within,
The whole day died, but, dying, gleam'd on rocks
Roof-pendent, sharp; and others from the floor,
Tusklike, arising, made that mouth of night
Whereout the demon issued up from hell.
He mark'd not this, but, blind and deaf to all
Save that chain'd rage which ever yelpt within,
Past eastward from the falling sun. At once
He felt the hollow-beaten mosses thud
And tremble, and then the shadow of a spear,
Shot from behind him, ran along the ground.
Sideways he started from the path, and saw,
With pointed lance as if to pierce, a shape,
A light of armour by him flash, and pass
And vanish in the woods; and follow'd this,
But all so blind in rage that unawares
He burst his lance against a forest bough,
Dishorsed himself, and rose again, and fled
Far, till the castle of a king, the hall
Of Pellam, lichen-bearded, grayly draped
With streaming grass, appear'd, low-built but strong;
The ruinous donjon as a knoll of moss,
The battlement overtopt with ivy-tods,
A home of bats, in every tower an owl.

Then spake the men of Pellam crying, "Lord,
Why wear ye this crown-royal upon shield?"

Said Balin, " For the fairest and the best
Of ladies living gave me this to bear."
So stall'd his horse, and strode across the court,
But found the greetings both of knight and King
Faint in the low dark hall of banquet. Leaves
Laid their green faces flat against the panes,
Sprays grated, and the canker'd boughs without
Whined in the wood; for all was hush'd within,
Till when at feast Sir Garlon likewise ask'd,
" Why wear ye that crown-royal ? " Balin said,
" The Queen we worship, Lancelot, I, and all,
As fairest, best, and purest, granted me
To bear it! " Such a sound—for Arthur's knights
Were hated strangers in the hall—as makes
The white swan-mother, sitting, when she hears
A strange knee rustle thro' her secret reeds,
Made Garlon, hissing; then he sourly smiled:
" Fairest I grant her—I have seen; but best,
Best, purest ? *thou* from Arthur's hall, and yet
So simple! hast thou eyes, or if, are these
So far besotted that they fail to see
This fair wife-worship cloaks a secret shame ?
Truly, ye men of Arthur be but babes."

A goblet on the board by Balin, boss'd
With holy Joseph's legend, on his right
Stood, all of massiest bronze. One side had sea
And ship and sail and angels blowing on it;

And one was rough with wattling, and the walls
Of that low church he built at Glastonbury.
This Balin grasped, but while in act to hurl,
Thro' memory of that token on the shield
Relax'd his hold. "I will be gentle," he thought,
"And passing gentle;" caught his hand away,
Then fiercely to Sir Garlon: "Eyes have I
That saw to-day the shadow of a spear,
Shot from behind me, run along the ground;
Eyes too that long have watch'd how Lancelot draws
From homage to the best and purest, might,
Name, manhood, and a grace, but scantly thine
Who, sitting in thine own hall, canst endure
To mouth so huge a foulness—to thy guest,
Me, me of Arthur's Table. Felon talk!
Let be! no more!"

But not the less by night
The scorn of Garlon, poisoning all his rest,
Stung him in dreams. At length, and dim thro' leaves,
Blinkt the white morn, sprays grated, and old boughs
Whined in the wood. He rose, descended, met
The scorner in the castle court, and fain,
For hate and loathing, would have past him by;
But when Sir Garlon utter'd mocking-wise,
"What, wear ye still that same crown-scandalous?"
His countenance blacken'd, and his forehead veins
Bloated and branch'd; and tearing out of sheath

The brand, Sir Balin with a fiery, "Ha!
So thou be shadow, here I make thee ghost,"
Hard upon helm smote him, and the blade flew
Splintering in six, and clinkt upon the stones.
Then Garlon, reeling slowly backward, fell,
And Balin by the banneret of his helm
Dragg'd him, and struck, but from the castle a cry
Sounded across the court, and—men-at-arms,
A score with pointed lances, making at him—
He dash'd the pummel at the foremost face,
Beneath a low door dipt, and made his feet
Wings thro' a glimmering gallery, till he mark'd
The portal of King Pellam's chapel wide
And inward to the wall; he stept behind;
Thence in a moment heard them pass like wolves
Howling; but while he stared about the shrine,
In which he scarce could spy the Christ for Saints,
Beheld before a golden altar lie
The longest lance his eyes had ever seen,
Point-painted red; and seizing thereupon
Push'd thro' an open casement down, lean'd on it,
Leapt in a semicircle, and lit on earth;
Then hand at ear, and harkening from what side
The blindfold rummage buried in the walls
Might echo, ran the counter path, and found
His charger, mounted on him and away.
An arrow whizz'd to the right, one to the left,
One overhead; and Pellam's feeble cry,

" Stay, stay him! he defileth heavenly things
With earthly uses! " made him quickly dive
Beneath the boughs, and race thro' many a mile
Of dense and open, till his goodly horse,
Arising wearily at a fallen oak,
Stumbled headlong, and cast him face to ground.

Half-wroth he had not ended, but all glad,
Knightlike, to find his charger yet unlamed,
Sir Balin drew the shield from off his neck,
Stared at the priceless cognisance, and thought,
" I have shamed thee so that now thou shamest me,
Thee will I bear no more," high on a branch
Hung it, and turn'd aside into the woods,
And there in gloom cast himself all along,
Moaning, " My violences, my violences! "

But now the wholesome music of the wood
Was dumb'd by one from out the hall of Mark,
A damsel-errant, warbling, as she rode
The woodland alleys, Vivien, with her squire.

" The fire of heaven has kill'd the barren cold,
And kindled all the plain and all the wold.
The new leaf ever pushes off the old.
The fire of heaven is not the flame of hell.

"Old priest, who mumble worship in your quire—
Old monk and nun, ye scorn the world's desire,
Yet in your frosty cells ye feel the fire!
The fire of heaven is not the flame of hell.

"The fire of heaven is on the dusty ways.
The wayside blossoms open to the blaze.
The whole wood-world is one full peal of praise.
The fire of heaven is not the flame of hell.

"The fire of heaven is lord of all things good,
And starve not thou this fire within thy blood,
But follow Vivien thro' the fiery flood!
The fire of heaven is not the flame of hell!"

Then turning to her squire, "This fire of heaven,
This old sun-worship, boy, will rise again,
And beat the Cross to earth, and break the King
And all his Table."

Then they reach'd a glade,
Where under one long lane of cloudless air
Before another wood, the royal crown
Sparkled, and swaying upon a restless elm
Drew the vague glance of Vivien and her squire.
Amazed were these; "Lo there," she cried—"a crown—
Borne by some high lord-prince of Arthur's hall,
And there a horse! the rider? where is he?

See, yonder lies one dead within the wood.
Not dead; he stirs!—but sleeping. I will speak.
Hail, royal knight, we break on thy sweet rest,
Not, doubtless, all unearn'd by noble deeds.
But bounden art thou, if from Arthur's hall,
To help the weak. Behold, I fly from shame,
A lustful king, who sought to win my love
Thro' evil ways. The knight with whom I rode
Hath suffer'd misadventure, and my squire
Hath in him small defence; but thou, Sir Prince,
Wilt surely guide me to the warrior King,
Arthur the blameless, pure as any maid,
To get me shelter for my maidenhood.
I charge thee by that crown upon thy shield,
And by the great Queen's name, arise and hence."

And Balin rose: "Thither no more! nor prince
Nor knight am I, but one that hath defamed
The cognisance she gave me. Here I dwell
Savage among the savage woods, here die—
Die—let the wolves' black maws ensepulchre
Their brother beast, whose anger was his lord!
O me, that such a name as Guinevere's,
Which our high Lancelot hath so lifted up,
And been thereby uplifted, should thro' me,
My violence, and my villainy, come to shame!"

Thereat she suddenly laugh'd and shrill, anon

Sigh'd all as suddenly. Said Balin to her:
" Is this thy courtesy—to mock me, ha?
Hence, for I will not with thee." Again she sigh'd:
" Pardon, sweet lord! we maidens often laugh
When sick at heart, when rather we should weep.
I knew thee wrong'd. I brake upon thy rest,
And now full loth am I to break thy dream,
But thou art man, and canst abide a truth,
Tho' bitter. Hither, boy—and mark me well.
Dost thou remember at Caerleon once—
A year ago—nay, then I love thee not—
Ay, thou rememberest well—one summer dawn—
By the great tower—Caerleon upon Usk—
Nay, truly we were hidden—this fair lord,
The flower of all their vestal knighthood, knelt
In amorous homage—knelt—what else? —O ay,
Knelt, and drew down from out his nightblack hair
And mumbled that white hand whose ring'd caress
Had wander'd from her own King's golden head,
And lost itself in darkness, till she cried—
I thought the great tower would crash down on both—
' Rise, my sweet King, and kiss me on the lips,
Thou art my King.' This lad, whose lightest word
Is mere white truth in simple nakedness,
Saw them embrace; he reddens, cannot speak,
So bashful, he! but all the maiden Saints,
The deathless mother-maidenhood of heaven,
Cry out upon her. Up then, ride with me!

Talk not of shame! thou canst not, an thou wouldst,
Do these more shame than these have done themselves."

She lied with ease; but horror-stricken he,
Remembering that dark bower at Camelot,
Breathed in a dismal whisper, " It is truth."

Sunnily she smiled: " And even in this lone wood,
Sweet lord, ye do right well to whisper this.
Fools prate, and perish traitors. Woods have tongues,
As walls have ears; but thou shalt go with me,
And we will speak at first exceeding low.
Meet is it the good King be not deceived.
See now, I set thee high on vantage ground,
From whence to watch the time, and eagle-like
Stoop at thy will on Lancelot and the Queen."

She ceased; his evil spirit upon him leapt,
He ground his teeth together, sprang with a yell,
Tore from the branch and cast on earth the shield,
Drove his mail'd heel athwart the royal crown,
Stampt all into defacement, hurl'd it from him
Among the forest weeds, and cursed the tale,
The told-of, and the teller.

That weird yell,
Unearthlier than all shriek of bird or beast,
Thrill'd thro' the woods; and Balan lurking there—

His quest was unaccomplish'd—heard and thought
" The scream of that wood-devil I came to quell! "
Then nearing: " Lo! he hath slain some brother-
knight,
And tramples on the goodly shield to show
His loathing of our Order and the Queen.
My quest, meseems, is here. Or devil or man,
Guard thou thine head." Sir Balin spake not word,
But snatch'd a sudden buckler from the squire,
And vaulted on his horse, and so they crash'd
In onset, and King Pellam's holy spear,
Reputed to be red with sinless blood,
Redden'd at once with sinful, for the point
Across the maiden shield of Balan prick'd
The hauberk to the flesh; and Balin's horse
Was wearied to the death, and, when they clash'd,
Rolling back upon Balin, crush'd the man
Inward, and either fell and swoon'd away.

Then to her squire mutter'd the damsel: " Fools!
This fellow hath wrought some foulness with his Queen;
Else never had he borne her crown, nor raved
And thus foam'd over at a rival name.
But thou, Sir Chick, that scarce hast broken shell,
Art yet half-yolk, not even come to down—
Who never sawest Caerleon upon Usk—
And yet hast often pleaded for my love—
See what I see, be thou where I have been,

Or else, Sir Chick—dismount and loose their casques;
I fain would know what manner of men they be."
And when the squire had loosed them, "Goodly!—look!
They might have cropt the myriad flower of May,
And butt each other here, like brainless bulls,
Dead for one heifer!"

Then the gentle squire:
"I hold them happy, so they died for love;
And, Vivien, tho' ye beat me like your dog,
I too could die, as now I live, for thee."

"Live on, Sir Boy," she cried; "I better prize
The living dog than the dead lion. Away!
I cannot brook to gaze upon the dead."
Then leapt her palfrey o'er the fallen oak,
And bounding forward, "Leave them to the wolves."

But when their foreheads felt the cooling air,
Balin first woke, and seeing that true face,
Familiar up from cradle-time, so wan,
Crawl'd slowly with low moans to where he lay,
And on his dying brother cast himself
Dying; and *he* lifted faint eyes; he felt
One near him; all at once they found the world,
Staring wild-wide; then with a childlike wail,
And drawing down the dim disastrous brow
That o'er him hung, he kiss'd it, moan'd, and spake:

"O Balin, Balin, I that fain had died
To save thy life, have brought thee to thy death.
Why had ye not the shield I knew? and why
Trampled ye thus on that which bare the crown?"

Then Balin told him brokenly and in gasps
All that had chanced, and Balan moan'd again:

"Brother, I dwelt a day in Pellam's hall;
This Garlon mock'd me, but I heeded not.
And one said, 'Eat in peace! a liar is he,
And hates thee for the tribute!' This good knight
Told me that twice a wanton damsel came,
And sought for Garlon at the castle-gates,
Whom Pellam drove away with holy heat.
I well believe this damsel, and the one
Who stood beside thee even now, the same.
'She dwells among the woods,' he said, 'and meets
And dallies with him in the Mouth of Hell.'
Foul are their lives, foul are their lips; they lied.
Pure as our own true mother is our Queen."

"O brother," answer'd Balin, "woe is me!
My madness all thy life has been thy doom,
Thy curse, and darken'd all thy day; and now
The night has come. I scarce can see thee now.
Good-night! for we shall never bid again
Good-morrow—Dark my doom was here, and dark

It will be there. I see thee now no more.
I would not mine again should darken thine;
Good-night, true brother."

Balan answer'd low,
" Good-night, true brother, here! good-morrow there!
We two were born together, and we die
Together by one doom:" and while he spoke
Closed his death-drowsing eyes, and slept the sleep
With Balin, either lock'd in either's arm.

Merlin and Vivien

Merlin and Vivien

A STORM was coming, but the winds were still,
And in the wild woods of Broceliande,
Before an oak, so hollow, huge, and old
It look'd a tower of ivied masonwork,
At Merlin's feet the wily Vivien lay.

For he that always bare in bitter grudge
The slights of Arthur and his Table, Mark
The Cornish King, had heard a wandering voice,
A minstrel of Caerleon by strong storm
Blown into shelter at Tintagil, say
That out of naked knight-like purity
Sir Lancelot worshipt no unmarried girl,
But the great Queen herself, fought in her name,
Sware by her—vows like theirs that high in heaven
Love most, but neither marry nor are given
In marriage, angels of our Lord's report.

He ceased, and then—for Vivien sweetly said
(She sat beside the banquet nearest Mark),

"And is the fair example follow'd, sir,
In Arthur's household?"—answer'd innocently:

"Ay, by some few—ay, truly—youths that hold
It more beseems the perfect virgin knight
To worship woman as true wife beyond
All hopes of gaining, than as maiden girl.
They place their pride in Lancelot and the Queen.
So passionate for an utter purity
Beyond the limit of their bond are these,
For Arthur bound them not to singleness.
Brave hearts and clean! and yet—God guide them!—
young."

Then Mark was half in heart to hurl his cup
Straight at the speaker, but forbore. He rose
To leave the hall, and, Vivien following him,
Turn'd to her: "Here are snakes within the grass;
And you methinks, O Vivien, save ye fear
The monkish manhood, and the mask of pure
Worn by this court, can stir them till they sting."

And Vivien answer'd, smiling scornfully:
"Why fear? because that foster'd at *thy* court
I savour of thy—virtues? fear them? no,
As love, if love be perfect, casts out fear,
So hate, if hate be perfect, casts out fear.
My father died in battle against the King,

My mother on his corpse in open field;
She bore me there, for born from death was I
Among the dead and sown upon the wind—
And then on thee! and shown the truth betimes,
That old true filth, and bottom of the well,
Where Truth is hidden. Gracious lessons thine,
And maxims of the mud! 'This Arthur pure!
Great Nature thro' the flesh herself hath made
Gives him the lie! There is no being pure,
My cherub; saith not Holy Writ the same?'—
If I were Arthur, I would have thy blood.
Thy blessing, stainless King! I bring thee back,
When I have ferreted out their burrowings,
The hearts of all this Order in mine hand—
Ay—so that fate and craft and folly close,
Perchance, one curl of Arthur's golden beard.
To me this narrow grizzled fork of thine
Is cleaner-fashion'd—Well, I loved thee first;
That warps the wit."

Loud laugh'd the graceless Mark.
But Vivien, into Camelot stealing, lodged
Low in the city, and on a festal day
When Guinevere was crossing the great hall
Cast herself down, knelt to the Queen, and wail'd.

"Why kneel ye there? What evil have ye wrought?
Rise!" and the damsel bidden rise arose

And stood with folded hands and downward eyes
Of glancing corner, and all meekly said:
"None wrought, but suffer'd much, an orphan maid!
My father died in battle for thy King,
My mother on his corpse—in open field,
The sad sea-sounding wastes of Lyonesse—
Poor wretch—no friend!—and now by Mark the king,
For that small charm of feature mine, pursued—
If any such be mine—I fly to thee.
Save, save me thou! Woman of women—thine
The wreath of beauty, thine the crown of power,
Be thine the balm of pity, O heaven's own white
Earth-angel, stainless bride of stainless King—
Help, for he follows! take me to thyself!
O yield me shelter for mine innocency
Among thy maidens!"

Here her slow sweet eyes
Fear-tremulous, but humbly hopeful, rose
Fixt on her hearer's, while the Queen who stood
All glittering like May sunshine on May leaves
In green and gold, and plumed with green, replied:
"Peace, child! of over-praise and over-blame
We choose the last. Our noble Arthur, him
Ye scarce can overpraise, will hear and know.
Nay—we believe all evil of thy Mark—
Well, we shall test thee farther; but this hour
We ride a-hawking with Sir Lancelot.

He hath given us a fair falcon which he train'd;
We go to prove it. Bide ye here the while."

She past; and Vivien murmur'd after, "Go!
I bide the while." Then thro' the portal-arch
Peering askance, and muttering broken-wise,
As one that labours with an evil dream,
Beheld the Queen and Lancelot get to horse.

"Is that the Lancelot? goodly—ay, but gaunt;
Courteous—amends for gauntness—takes her hand—
That glance of theirs, but for the street, had been
A clinging kiss—how hand lingers in hand!
Let go at last!—they ride away—to hawk
For waterfowl. Royaller game is mine.
For such a supersensual sensual bond
As that grey cricket chirpt of at our hearth—
Touch flax with flame—a glance will serve—the liars!
Ah little rat that borest in the dyke
Thy hole by night to let the boundless deep
Down upon far-off cities while they dance—
Or dream—of thee they dream'd not—nor of me
These—ay, but each of either; ride, and dream
The mortal dream that never yet was mine—
Ride, ride and dream until ye wake—to me!
Then, narrow court and lubber King, farewell!
For Lancelot will be gracious to the rat,
And our wise Queen, if knowing that I know,
Will hate, loathe, fear—but honour me the more."

Yet while they rode together down the plain,
Their talk was all of training, terms of art,
Diet and seeling, jesses, leash and lure.
"She is too noble," he said, "to check at pies,
Nor will she rake: there is no baseness in her."
Here when the Queen demanded as by chance,
"Know ye the stranger woman?" "Let her be,"
Said Lancelot, and unhooded casting off
The goodly falcon free; she tower'd; her bells,
Tone under tone, shrill'd; and they lifted up
Their eager faces, wondering at the strength,
Boldness, and royal knighthood of the bird,
Who pounced her quarry and slew it. Many a time
As once—of old—among the flowers—they rode.

But Vivien half-forgotten of the Queen
Among her damsels broidering sat, heard, watch'd,
And whisper'd. Thro' the peaceful court she crept
And whisper'd; then, as Arthur in the highest
Leaven'd the world, so Vivien in the lowest,
Arriving at a time of golden rest,
And sowing one ill hint from ear to ear,
While all the heathen lay at Arthur's feet,
And no quest came, but all was joust and play,
Leaven'd his hall. They heard and let her be.

Thereafter, as an enemy that has left
Death in the living waters and withdrawn,
The wily Vivien stole from Arthur's court.

She hated all the knights, and heard in thought
Their lavish comment when her name was named.
For once, when Arthur walking all alone,
Vext at a rumour issued from herself
Of some corruption crept among his knights,
Had met her, Vivien, being greeted fair,
Would fain have wrought upon his cloudy mood
With reverent eyes mock-loyal, shaken voice,
And flutter'd adoration, and at last
With dark sweet hints of some who prized him more
Than who should prize him most; at which the King
Had gazed upon her blankly and gone by.
But one had watch'd, and had not held his peace;
It made the laughter of an afternoon
That Vivien should attempt the blameless King.
And after that, she set herself to gain
Him, the most famous man of all those times,
Merlin, who knew the range of all their arts,
Had built the King his havens, ships, and halls,
Was also bard, and knew the starry heavens;
The people call'd him Wizard; whom at first
She play'd about with slight and sprightly talk,
And vivid smiles, and faintly-venom'd points
Of slander, glancing here and grazing there;
And yielding to his kindlier moods, the Seer
Would watch her at her petulance and play,
Ev'n when they seem'd unlovable, and laugh
As those that watch a kitten. Thus he grew

Tolerant of what he half disdain'd, and she,
Perceiving that she was but half disdain'd,
Began to break her sports with graver fits,
Turn red or pale, would often when they met
Sigh fully, or all-silent gaze upon him
With such a fixt devotion that the old man,
Tho' doubtful, felt the flattery, and at times
Would flatter his own wish in age for love,
And half believe her true; for thus at times
He waver'd, but that other clung to him,
Fixt in her will, and so the seasons went.

Then fell on Merlin a great melancholy;
He walk'd with dreams and darkness, and he found
A doom that ever poised itself to fall,
An ever-moaning battle in the mist,
World-war of dying flesh against the life,
Death in all life and lying in all love,
The meanest having power upon the highest,
And the high purpose broken by the worm.

So leaving Arthur's court he gain'd the beach,
There found a little boat and stept into it;
And Vivien follow'd, but he mark'd her not.
She took the helm and he the sail; the boat
Drave with a sudden wind across the deeps,
And, touching Breton sands, they disembark'd.
And then she follow'd Merlin all the way,

Ev'n to the wild woods of Broceliande.
For Merlin once had told her of a charm,
The which if any wrought on any one
With woven paces and with waving arms,
The man so wrought on ever seem'd to lie
Closed in the four walls of a hollow tower,
From which was no escape for evermore;
And none could find that man for evermore,
Nor could he see but him who wrought the charm
Coming and going, and he lay as dead
And lost to life and use and name and fame.
And Vivien ever sought to work the charm
Upon the great enchanter of the time,
As fancying that her glory would be great
According to his greatness whom she quench'd.

There lay she all her length and kiss'd his feet,
As if in deepest reverence and in love.
A twist of gold was round her hair; a robe
Of samite without price, that more exprest
Than hid her, clung about her lissome limbs,
In colour like the satin-shining palm
On sallows in the windy gleams of March.
And while she kiss'd them, crying, " Trample me,
Dear feet, that I have follow'd thro' the world,
And I will pay you worship; tread me down
And I will kiss you for it;" he was mute.
So dark a forethought roll'd about his brain,

As on a dull day in an ocean cave
The blind wave feeling round his long sea-hall
In silence; wherefore, when she lifted up
A face of sad appeal, and spake and said,
" O Merlin, do ye love me ? " and again,
" O Merlin, do ye love me ? " and once more,
" Great Master, do ye love me ? " he was mute.
And lissome Vivien, holding by his heel,
Writhed toward him, slided up his knee and sat,
Behind his ankle twined her hollow feet
Together, curved an arm about his neck,
Clung like a snake; and letting her left hand
Droop from his mighty shoulder, as a leaf,
Made with her right a comb of pearl to part
The lists of such a beard as youth gone out
Had left in ashes. Then he spoke and said,
Not looking at her, " Who are wise in love
Love most, say least," and Vivien answer'd quick:
" I saw the little elf-god eyeless once
In Arthur's arras hall at Camelot;
But neither eyes nor tongue—O stupid child!
Yet you are wise who say it; let me think
Silence is wisdom. I am silent then,
And ask no kiss;" then adding all at once,
" And lo, I clothe myself with wisdom," drew
The vast and shaggy mantle of his beard
Across her neck and bosom to her knee,
And call'd herself a gilded summer fly

Caught in a great old tyrant spider's web,
Who meant to eat her up in that wild wood
Without one word. So Vivien call'd herself,
But rather seem'd a lovely baleful star
Veil'd in grey vapour; till he sadly smiled:
"To what request for what strange boon," he said,
"Are these your pretty tricks and fooleries,
O Vivien, the preamble? yet my thanks,
For these have broken up my melancholy."

And Vivien answer'd smiling saucily:
"What, O my Master, have ye found your voice?
I bid the stranger welcome. Thanks at last!
But yesterday you never open'd lip,
Except indeed to drink. No cup had we;
In mine own lady palms I cull'd the spring
That gather'd trickling dropwise from the cleft,
And made a pretty cup of both my hands
And offer'd you it kneeling. Then you drank
And knew no more, nor gave me one poor word;
O no more thanks than might a goat have given
With no more sign of reverence than a beard.
And when we halted at that other well,
And I was faint to swooning, and you lay
Foot-gilt with all the blossom-dust of those
Deep meadows we had traversed, did you know
That Vivien bathed your feet before her own?
And yet no thanks; and all thro' this wild wood

And all this morning when I fondled you.
Boon, ay, there was a boon, one not so strange—
How had I wrong'd you? surely ye are wise,
But such a silence is more wise than kind."

And Merlin lock'd his hand in hers and said:
" O did ye never lie upon the shore,
And watch the curl'd white of the coming wave
Glass'd in the slippery sand before it breaks?
Ev'n such a wave, but not so pleasurable,
Dark in the glass of some presageful mood,
Had I for three days seen, ready to fall.
And then I rose and fled from Arthur's court
To break the mood. You follow'd me unask'd;
And when I look'd, and saw you following still,
My mind involved yourself the nearest thing
In that mind-mist—for shall I tell you truth?
You seem'd that wave about to break upon me
And sweep me from my hold upon the world,
My use and name and fame. Your pardon, child.
Your pretty sports have brighten'd all again.
And ask your boon, for boon I owe you thrice,
Once for wrong done you by confusion, next
For thanks it seems till now neglected, last
For these your dainty gambols; wherefore ask,
And take this boon so strange and not so strange."

And Vivien answer'd smiling mournfully:

" O not so strange as my long asking it,
Not yet so strange as you yourself are strange,
Nor half so strange as that dark mood of yours.
I ever fear'd ye were not wholly mine;
And see, yourself have own'd ye did me wrong.
The people call you prophet; let it be;
But not of those that can expound themselves.
Take Vivien for expounder; she will call
That three-days-long presageful gloom of yours
No presage, but the same mistrustful mood
That makes you seem less noble than yourself,
Whenever I have ask'd this very boon,
Now ask'd again; for see you not, dear love,
That such a mood as that which lately gloom'd
Your fancy when ye saw me following you
Must make me fear still more you are not mine,
Must make me yearn still more to prove you mine,
And make me wish still more to learn this charm
Of woven paces and of waving hands,
As proof of trust. O Merlin, teach it me!
The charm so taught will charm us both to rest.
For, grant me some slight power upon your fate,
I, feeling that you felt me worthy trust,
Should rest and let you rest, knowing you mine.
And therefore be as great as ye are named,
Not muffled round with selfish reticence.
How hard you look and how denyingly!
O if you think this wickedness in me,

That I should prove it on you unawares,
That makes me passing wrathful; then our bond
Had best be loosed for ever; but think or not,
By Heaven that hears, I tell you the clean truth,
As clean as blood of babes, as white as milk!
O Merlin, may this earth, if ever I,
If these unwitty wandering wits of mine,
Ev'n in the jumbled rubbish of a dream,
Have tript on such conjectural treachery—
May this hard earth cleave to the nadir hell
Down, down, and close again and nip me flat,
If I be such a traitress! Yield my boon,
Till which I scarce can yield you all I am;
And grant my re-reiterated wish,
The great proof of your love; because I think,
However wise, ye hardly know me yet."

And Merlin loosed his hand from hers and said:
"I never was less wise, however wise,
Too curious Vivien, tho' you talk of trust,
Than when I told you first of such a charm.
Yea, if ye talk of trust I tell you this,
Too much I trusted when I told you that,
And stirr'd this vice in you which ruin'd man
Thro' woman the first hour; for howsoe'er
In children a great curiousness be well,
Who have to learn themselves and all the world,
In you, that are no child, for still I find

Your face is practised when I spell the lines,
I call it,—well, I will not call it vice;
But since you name yourself the summer fly,
I well could wish a cobweb for the gnat
That settles beaten back, and beaten back
Settles, till one could yield for weariness.
But since I will not yield to give you power
Upon my life and use and name and fame,
Why will ye never ask some other boon?
Yea, by God's rood, I trusted you too much!"

And Vivien, like the tenderest-hearted maid
That ever bided tryst at village stile,
Made answer, either eyelid wet with tears:
"Nay, Master, be not wrathful with your maid;
Caress her, let her feel herself forgiven
Who feels no heart to ask another boon.
I think ye hardly know the tender rhyme
Of 'trust me not at all or all in all.'
I heard the great Sir Lancelot sing it once,
And it shall answer for me. Listen to it:

"'In love, if love be love, if love be ours,
Faith and unfaith can ne'er be equal powers:
Unfaith in aught is want of faith in all.

"'It is the little rift within the lute,
That by and by will make the music mute,
And ever widening slowly silence all.

" 'The little rift within the lover's lute,
Or little pitted speck in garner'd fruit,
That rotting inward slowly moulders all.

" 'It is not worth the keeping; let it go:
But shall it? answer, darling, answer, no.
And trust me not at all or all in all.'

" O Master, do ye love my tender ryhme?"

And Merlin look'd and half believed her true,
So tender was her voice, so fair her face,
So sweetly gleam'd her eyes behind her tears
Like sunlight on the plain behind a shower;
And yet he answer'd half indignantly:

" Far other was the song that once I heard
By this huge oak, sung nearly where we sit;
For here we met, some ten or twelve of us,
To chase a creature that was current then
In these wild woods, the hart with golden horns.
It was the time when first the question rose
About the founding of a Table Round,
That was to be, for love of God and men
And noble deeds, the flower of all the world;
And each incited each to noble deeds.
And while we waited, one, the youngest of us,
We could not keep him silent, out he flash'd,

And into such a song, such fire for fame,
Such trumpet-blowings in it, coming down
To such a stern and iron-clashing close,
That when he stopt we long'd to hurl together,
And should have done it, but the beauteous beast
Scared by the noise upstarted at our feet,
And like a silver shadow slipt away
Thro' the dim land. And all day long we rode
Thro' the dim land against a rushing wind,
That glorious roundel echoing in our ears,
And chased the flashes of his golden horns
Until they vanish'd by the fairy well
That laughs at iron—as our warriors did—
Where children cast their pins and nails, and cry,
" Laugh, little well! " but touch it with a sword,
It buzzes fiercely round the point; and there
We lost him—such a noble song was that.
But, Vivien, when you sang me that sweet rhyme,
I felt as tho' you knew this cursed charm,
Were proving it on me, and that I lay
And felt them slowly ebbing, name and fame."

And Vivien answer'd smiling mournfully:
" O mine have ebb'd away for evermore,
And all thro' following you to this wild wood,
Because I saw you sad, to comfort you.
Lo now, what hearts have men! they never mount
As high as woman in her selfless mood.

And touching fame, howe'er ye scorn my song,
Take one verse more—the lady speaks it—this:

" ' My name, once mine, now thine, is closelier mine,
For fame, could fame be mine, that fame were thine,
And shame, could shame be thine, that shame were
mine.
So trust me not at all or all in all.'

" Says she not well? and there is more—this rhyme
Is like the fair pearl-necklace of the Queen,
That burst in dancing and the pearls were spilt;
Some lost, some stolen, some as relics kept;
But nevermore the same two sister pearls
Ran down the silken thread to kiss each other
On her white neck—so is it with this rhyme.
It lives dispersedly in many hands,
And every minstrel sings it differently;
Yet is there one true line, the pearl of pearls:
' Man dreams of fame while woman wakes to love.'
Yea! love, tho' love were of the grossest, carves
A portion from the solid present, eats
And uses, careless of the rest; but fame,
The fame that follows death is nothing to us;
And what is fame in life but half-disfame
And counterchanged with darkness? ye yourself
Know well that envy calls you devil's son,
And since ye seem the master of all art,
They fain would make you master of all vice."

And Merlin lock'd his hand in hers and said:
"I once was looking for a magic weed,
And found a fair young squire who sat alone,
Had carved himself a knightly shield of wood,
And then was painting on it fancied arms,
Azure, an eagle rising, or the sun
In dexter chief; the scroll, 'I follow fame.'
And speaking not, but leaning over him,
I took his brush and blotted out the bird,
And made a gardener putting in a graff,
With this for motto, 'Rather use than fame.'
You should have seen him blush; but afterwards
He made a stalwart knight. O Vivien,
For you, methinks you think you love me well;
For me, I love you somewhat. Rest; and Love
Should have some rest and pleasure in himself,
Not ever be too curious for a boon,
Too prurient for a proof against the grain
Of him ye say ye love. But Fame with men,
Being but ampler means to serve mankind,
Should have small rest or pleasure in herself,
But work as vassal to the larger love
That dwarfs the petty love of one to one.
Use gave me fame at first, and fame again
Increasing gave me use. Lo, there my boon!
What other? for men sought to prove me vile,
Because I fain had given them greater wits;
And then did envy call me devil's son.

The sick weak beast, seeking to help herself
By striking at her better, miss'd, and brought
Her own claw back, and wounded her own heart.
Sweet were the days when I was all unknown,
But when my name was lifted up the storm
Brake on the mountain and I cared not for it.
Right well know I that fame is half-disfame,
Yet needs must work my work. That other fame,
To one at least who hath not children vague,
The cackle of the unborn about the grave,
I cared not for it. A single misty star,
Which is the second in a line of stars
That seem a sword beneath a belt of three,
I never gazed upon it but I dreamt
Of some vast charm concluded in that star
To make fame nothing. Wherefore, if I fear,
Giving you power upon me thro' this charm,
That you might play me falsely, having power,
However well ye think ye love me now—
As sons of kings loving in pupilage
Have turn'd to tyrants when they came to power—
I rather dread the loss of use than fame;
If you—and not so much from wickedness,
As some wild turn of anger, or a mood
Of overstrain'd affection, it may be,
To keep me all to your own self,—or else
A sudden spurt of woman's jealousy,—
Should try this charm on whom ye say ye love."

And Vivien answer'd smiling as in wrath:
"Have I not sworn? I am not trusted. Good!
Well, hide it, hide it; I shall find it out,
And being found take heed of Vivien.
A woman and not trusted, doubtless I
Might feel some sudden turn of anger born
Of your misfaith; and your fine epithet
Is accurate too, for this full love of mine
Without the full heart back may merit well
Your term of overstrain'd. So used as I,
My daily wonder is, I love at all.
And as to woman's jealousy, O why not?
O to what end, except a jealous one,
And one to make me jealous if I love,
Was this fair charm invented by yourself?
I well believe that all about this world
Ye cage a buxom captive here and there,
Closed in the four walls of a hollow tower
From which is no escape for evermore."

Then the great master merrily answer'd her:
"Full many a love in loving youth was mine;
I needed then no charm to keep them mine
But youth and love; and that full heart of yours
Whereof ye prattle, may now assure you mine;
So live uncharm'd. For those who wrought it first,
The wrist is parted from the hand that waved,
The feet unmortised from their ankle-bones

Who paced it, ages back; but will ye hear
The legend as in guerdon for your rhyme?

"There lived a king in the most eastern East,
Less old than I, yet older, for my blood
Hath earnest in it of far springs to be.
A tawny pirate anchor'd in his port,
Whose bark had plunder'd twenty nameless isles;
And passing one, at the high peep of dawn,
He saw two cities in a thousand boats
All fighting for a woman on the sea.
And pushing his black craft among them all,
He lightly scatter'd theirs and brought her off,
With loss of half his people arrow-slain;
A maid so smooth, so white, so wonderful,
They said a light came from her when she moved.
And since the pirate would not yield her up,
The King impaled him for his piracy,
Then made her Queen. But those isle-nurtured eyes
Waged such unwilling tho' successful war
On all the youth, they sicken'd; councils thinn'd,
And armies waned, for magnet-like she drew
The rustiest iron of old fighters' hearts;
And beasts themselves would worship; camels knelt
Unbidden, and the brutes of mountain back
That carry kings in castles bow'd black knees
Of homage, ringing with their serpent hands,
To make her smile, her golden ankle-bells.

What wonder, being jealous, that he sent
His horns of proclamation out thro' all
The hundred under-kingdoms that he sway'd
To find a wizard who might teach the King
Some charm which, being wrought upon the Queen,
Might keep her all his own. To such a one
He promised more than ever king has given,
A league of mountain full of golden mines,
A province with a hundred miles of coast,
A palace and a princess, all for him;
But on all those who tried and fail'd the King
Pronounced a dismal sentence, meaning by it
To keep the list low and pretenders back,
Or, like a king, not to be trifled with—
Their heads should moulder on the city gates.
And many tried and fail'd, because the charm
Of nature in her overbore their own;
And many a wizard brow bleach'd on the walls,
And many weeks a troop of carrion crows
Hung like a cloud above the gateway towers."

And Vivien, breaking in upon him, said:
" I sit and gather honey; yet, methinks,
Thy tongue has tript a little; ask thyself.
The lady never made *unwilling* war
With those fine eyes; she had her pleasure in it,
And made her good man jealous with good cause.
And lived there neither dame nor damsel then

Wroth at a lover's loss? were all as tame,
I mean, as noble, as their queen was fair?
Not one to flirt a venom at her eyes,
Or pinch a murderous dust into her drink,
Or make her paler with a poison'd rose?
Well, those were not our days—but did they find
A wizard? Tell me, was he like to thee?"

She ceased, and made her lithe arm round his neck
Tighten, and then drew back, and let her eyes
Speak for her, glowing on him, like a bride's
On her new lord, her own, the first of men.

He answer'd laughing: "Nay, not like to me.
At last they found—his foragers for charms—
A little glassy-headed hairless man,
Who lived alone in a great wild on grass;
Read but one book, and ever reading grew
So grated down and filed away with thought,
So lean his eyes were monstrous; while the skin
Clung but to crate and basket, ribs and spine.
And since he kept his mind on one sole aim,
Nor ever touch'd fierce wine, nor tasted flesh,
Nor own'd a sensual wish, to him the wall
That sunders ghosts and shadow-casting men
Became a crystal, and he saw them thro' it,
And heard their voices talk behind the wall,
And learnt their elemental secrets, powers

And forces; often o'er the sun's bright eye
Drew the vast eyelid of an inky cloud,
And lash'd it at the base with slanting storm;
Or in the noon of mist and driving rain,
When the lake whiten'd and the pinewood roar'd,
And the cairn'd mountain was a shadow, sunn'd
The world to peace again. Here was the man;
And so by force they dragg'd him to the King.
And then he taught the King to charm the Queen
In such-wise that no man could see her more,
Nor saw she save the King, who wrought the charm,
Coming and going, and she lay as dead,
And lost all use of life. But when the King
Made proffer of the league of golden mines,
The province with a hundred miles of coast,
The palace and the princess, that old man
Went back to his old wild, and lived on grass,
And vanish'd, and his book came down to me."

And Vivien answer'd smiling saucily:
" Ye have the book; the charm is written in it.
Good! take my counsel, let me know it at once;
For keep it like a puzzle chest in chest,
With each chest lock'd and padlock'd thirty-fold,
And whelm all this beneath as vast a mound
As after furious battle turfs the slain
On some wild down above the windy deep,
I yet should strike upon a sudden means

To dig, pick, open, find and read the charm;
Then, if I tried it, who should blame me then?"

And smiling as a master smiles at one
That is not of his school, nor any school
But that where blind and naked Ignorance
Delivers brawling judgments, unashamed,
On all things all day long, he answer'd her:

"Thou read the book, my pretty Vivien!
O ay, it is but twenty pages long,
But every page having an ample marge,
And every marge enclosing in the midst
A square of text that looks a little blot,
The text no larger than the limbs of fleas;
And every square of text an awful charm,
Writ in a language that has long gone by,
So long that mountains have arisen since
With cities on their flanks—thou read the book!
And every margin scribbled, crost, and cramm'd
With comment, densest condensation, hard
To mind and eye; but the long sleepless nights
Of my long life have made it easy to me.
And none can read the text, not even I;
And none can read the comment but myself;
And in the comment did I find the charm.
O, the results are simple; a mere child
Might use it to the harm of any one,

And never could undo it. Ask no more;
For tho' you should not prove it upon me,
But keep that oath ye sware, ye might, perchance,
Assay it on some one of the Table Round,
And all because ye dream they babble of you."

And Vivien, frowning in true anger, said:
" What dare the full-fed liars say of me?
They ride abroad redressing human wrongs!
They sit with knife in meat and wine in horn!
They bound to holy vows of chastity!
Were I not woman, I could tell a tale.
But you are man, you well can understand
The shame that cannot be explain'd for shame.
Not one of all the drove should touch me: swine!"

Then answer'd Merlin careless of her words:
" You breathe but accusation vast and vague,
Spleen-born, I think, and proofless. If ye know,
Set up the charge ye know, to stand or fall!"

And Vivien answer'd frowning wrathfully:
" O ay, what say ye to Sir Valence, him
Whose kinsman left him watcher o'er his wife
And two fair babes, and went to distant lands,
Was one year gone, and on returning found
Not two but three? there lay the reckling, one
But one hour old! What said the happy sire?

A seven-months' babe had been a truer gift.
Those twelve sweet moons confused his fatherhood."

Then answer'd Merlin: "Nay, I know the tale.
Sir Valence wedded with an outland dame;
Some cause had kept him sunder'd from his wife.
One child they had; it lived with her; she died.
His kinsman travelling on his own affair
Was charged by Valence to bring home the child.
He brought, not found it therefore; take the truth."

"O ay," said Vivien, "overtrue a tale!
What say ye then to sweet Sir Sagamore,
That ardent man? 'To pluck the flower in season,'
So says the song, 'I trow it is no treason.'
O Master, shall we call him overquick
To crop his own sweet rose before the hour?"

And Merlin answer'd: "Overquick art thou
To catch a loathly plume fallen from the wing
Of that foul bird of rapine whose whole prey
Is man's good name. He never wrong'd his bride.
I know the tale. An angry gust of wind
Puff'd out his torch among the myriad-room'd
And many-corridor'd complexities
Of Arthur's palace. Then he found a door,
And darkling felt the sculptured ornament
That wreathen round it made it seem his own,

And wearied out made for the couch and slept,
A stainless man beside a stainless maid;
And either slept, nor knew of other there,
Till the high dawn piercing the royal rose
In Arthur's casement glimmer'd chastely down,
Blushing upon them blushing, and at once
He rose without a word and parted from her.
But when the thing was blazed about the court,
The brute world howling forced them into bonds,
And as it chanced they are happy, being pure."

"O ay," said Vivien, "that were likely too!
What say ye then to fair Sir Percivale
And of the horrid foulness that he wrought,
The saintly youth, the spotless lamb of Christ,
Or some black wether of Saint Satan's fold?
What, in the precincts of the chapel-yard,
Among the knightly brasses of the graves,
And by the cold Hic Jacets of the dead!"

And Merlin answer'd careless of her charge:
"A sober man is Percivale and pure,
But once in life was fluster'd with new wine,
Then paced for coolness in the chapel-yard,
Where one of Satan's shepherdesses caught
And meant to stamp him with her master's mark.
And that he sinn'd is not believable;
For, look upon his face!—but if he sinn'd,

The sin that practice burns into the blood,
And not the one dark hour which brings remorse,
Will brand us, after, of whose fold we be;
Or else were he, the holy king whose hymns
Are chanted in the minster, worse than all.
But is your spleen froth'd out, or have ye more?"

And Vivien answer'd frowning yet in wrath:
"O ay; what say ye to Sir Lancelot, friend,
Traitor or true? that commerce with the Queen,
I ask you, is it clamour'd by the child,
Or whisper'd in the corner? do ye know it?"

To which he answer'd sadly: "Yea, I know it.
Sir Lancelot went ambassador, at first,
To fetch her, and she watch'd him from her walls.
A rumour runs, she took him for the King,
So fixt her fancy on him; let them be.
But have ye no one word of loyal praise
For Arthur, blameless King and stainless man?"

She answer'd with a low and chuckling laugh:
"Man! is he man at all, who knows and winks?
Sees what his fair bride is and does, and winks?
By which the good King means to blind himself,
And blinds himself and all the Table Round
To all the foulness that they work. Myself
Could call him—were it not for womanhood—
The pretty, popular name such manhood earns,

Could call him the main cause of all their crime,
Yea, were he not crown'd King, coward and fool."

Then Merlin to his own heart, loathing, said:
" O true and tender! O my liege and King!
O selfish man and stainless gentleman,
Who wouldst against thine own eye-witness fain
Have all men true and leal, all women pure!
How, in the mouths of base interpreters,
From over-fineness not intelligible
To things with every sense as false and foul
As the poach'd filth that floods the middle street,
Is thy white blamelessness accounted blame!"

But Vivien, deeming Merlin overborne
By instance, recommenced, and let her tongue
Rage like a fire among the noblest names,
Polluting, and imputing her whole self,
Defaming and defacing, till she left
Not even Lancelot brave nor Galahad clean.

Her words had issue other than she will'd.
He dragg'd his eyebrow bushes down, and made
A snowy pent-house for his hollow eyes,
And mutter'd in himself: " Tell *her* the charm!
So, if she had it, would she rail on me
To snare the next, and if she have it not
So will she rail. What did the wanton say?
' Not mount as high! ' we scarce can sink as low;

For men at most differ as heaven and earth,
But women, worst and best, as heaven and hell.
I know the Table Round, my friends of old;
All brave, and many generous, and some chaste.
She cloaks the scar of some repulse with lies.
I well believe she tempted them and fail'd,
Being so bitter; for fine plots may fail,
Tho' harlots paint their talk as well as face
With colours of the heart that are not theirs.
I will not let her know; nine tithes of times
Face-flatterer and backbiter are the same.
And they, sweet soul, that most impute a crime
Are pronest to it, and impute themselves,
Wanting the mental range, or low desire
Not to feel lowest makes them level all;
Yea, they would pare the mountain to the plain,
To leave an equal baseness; and in this
Are harlots like the crowd, that if they find
Some stain or blemish in a name of note,
Not grieving that their greatest are so small,
Inflate themselves with some insane delight,
And judge all Nature from her feet of clay,
Without the will to lift their eyes, and see
Her godlike head crown'd with spiritual fire,
And touching other worlds. I am weary of her."

He spoke in words part heard, in whispers part,
Half-suffocated in the hoary fell

And many-winter'd fleece of throat and chin.
But Vivien, gathering somewhat of his mood,
And hearing "harlot" mutter'd twice or thrice,
Leapt from her session on his lap, and stood
Stiff as a viper frozen; loathsome sight,
How from the rosy lips of life and love
Flash'd the bare-grinning skeleton of death!
White was her cheek; sharp breaths of anger puff'd
Her fairy nostril out; her hand half-clench'd
Went faltering sideways downward to her belt,
And feeling. Had she found a dagger there—
For in a wink the false love turns to hate—
She would have stabb'd him; but she found it not.
His eye was calm, and suddenly she took
To bitter weeping like a beaten child,
A long, long weeping, not consolable.
Then her false voice made way, broken with sobs:

"O crueller than was ever told in tale
Or sung in song! O vainly lavish'd love!
O cruel, there was nothing wild or strange,
Or seeming shameful—for what shame in love,
So love be true, and not as yours is?—nothing
Poor Vivien had not done to win his trust
Who call'd her what he call'd her—all her crime,
All—all—the wish to prove him wholly hers."

She mused a little, and then clapt her hands
Together with a wailing shriek, and said:

"Stabb'd through the heart's affections to the heart!
Seethed like the kid in its own mother's milk!
Kill'd with a word worse than a life of blows!
I thought that he was gentle, being great;
O God, that I had loved a smaller man!
I should have found in him a greater heart.
O I, that flattering my true passion, saw
The knights, the court, the King, dark in your light,
Who loved to make men darker than they are,
Because of that high pleasure which I had
To seat you sole upon my pedestal
Of worship—I am answer'd, and henceforth
The course of life that seem'd so flowery to me
With you for guide and master, only you,
Becomes the sea-cliff pathway broken short,
And ending in a ruin—nothing left
But into some low cave to crawl, and there,
If the wolf spare me, weep my life away,
Kill'd with inutterable unkindliness."

She paused, she turn'd away, she hung her head,
The snake of gold slid from her hair, the braid
Slipt and uncoil'd itself, she wept afresh,
And the dark wood grew darker toward the storm
In silence, while his anger slowly died
Within him, till he let his wisdom go
For ease of heart, and half believed her true;
Call'd her to shelter in the hollow oak,

" Come from the storm," and having no reply,
Gazed at the heaving shoulder and the face
Hand-hidden, as for utmost grief or shame;
Then thrice essay'd, by tenderest-touching terms,
To sleek her ruffled peace of mind, in vain.
At last she let herself be conquer'd by him,
And as the cageling newly flown returns,
The seeming-injured simple-hearted thing
Came to her old perch back, and settled there.
There while she sat, half-falling from his knees,
Half-nestled at his heart, and since he saw
The slow tear creep from her closed eyelid yet,
About her, more in kindness than in love,
The gentle wizard cast a shielding arm.
But she dislink'd herself at once and rose,
Her arms upon her breast across, and stood,
A virtuous gentlewoman deeply wrong'd,
Upright and flush'd before him; then she said:

" There must be now no passages of love
Betwixt us twain henceforward evermore;
Since, if I be what I am grossly call'd,
What should be granted which your own gross heart
Would reckon worth the taking? I will go.
In truth, but one thing now—better have died
Thrice than have ask'd it once—could make me stay—
That proof of trust—so often ask'd in vain!
How justly, after that vile term of yours,

I find with grief! I might believe you then,
Who knows? once more. Lo! what was once to me
Mere matter of the fancy, now hath grown
The vast necessity of heart and life.
Farewell; think gently of me, for I fear
My fate or folly, passing gayer youth
For one so old, must be to love thee still.
But ere I leave thee let me swear once more
That if I schemed against thy peace in this,
May yon just heaven, that darkens o'er me, send
One flash that, missing all things else, may make
My scheming brain a cinder, if I lie."

Scarce had she ceased, when out of heaven a bolt—
For now the storm was close above them—struck,
Furrowing a giant oak, and javelining
With darted spikes and splinters of the wood
The dark earth round. He raised his eyes and saw
The tree that shone white-listed thro' the gloom.
But Vivien, fearing Heaven had heard her oath,
And dazzled by the livid-flickering fork,
And deafen'd with the stammering cracks and claps
That follow'd, flying back and crying out,
"O Merlin, tho' you do not love me, save,
Yet save me!" clung to him and hugg'd him close;
And call'd him dear protector in her fright,
Nor yet forgot her practice in her fright,
But wrought upon his mood and hugg'd him close.

The pale blood of the wizard at her touch
Took gayer colours, like an opal warm'd.
She blamed herself for telling hearsay tales;
She shook from fear, and for her fault she wept
Of petulancy; she call'd him lord and liege,
Her seer, her bard, her silver star of eve,
Her God, her Merlin, the one passionate love
Of her whole life; and ever overhead
Bellow'd the tempest, and the rotten branch
Snapt in the rushing of the river-rain
Above them; and in change of glare and gloom
Her eyes and neck glittering went and came;
Till now the storm, its burst of passion spent,
Moaning and calling out of other lands,
Had left the ravaged woodland yet once more
To peace; and what should not have been had been,
For Merlin, overtalk'd and overworn,
Had yielded, told her all the charm, and slept.

Then, in one moment, she put forth the charm
Of woven paces and of waving hands,
And in the hollow oak he lay as dead,
And lost to life and use and name and fame.

Then crying, "I have made his glory mine,"
And shrieking out, "O fool!" the harlot leapt
Adown the forest, and the thicket closed
Behind her, and the forest echo'd "fool."

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